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IRAQ: MURDEROUS BOMB ATTACKS IN KIRKUK

In the early afternoon of 11 December, while Muslims were celebrating the Feast of the Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha), a bomb attack took place in Kirkuk, in a restaurant that was particularly busy because of the feast. This resulted in 55 deaths and over a hundred people injured, 30 of whom very severely.

According to a waiter, Abbas Fadel, a kamikaze set of an explosive belt in the Abdallah

Restaurant, to which go by family parties of all the towns communities, Kurdish, Arab and Turcoman and which was particularly full that day because of the Feast. The Iraqi Defence Ministry later confirmed this witness's account.

Some police officers also reported the presence in this restaurant of members of the Huweija local Council, who might have been one of the terrorist's targets. Huweija is a Kirkuk province township. "It is

possible that the presence of these members of the Huweija Council attracted the attention of armed groups like al-Qaida or Ansar al-Islam", stated brigadier General Qader to the Press. According to one of the Huweija Council leaders, the dining rooms were full of women and children: "After we'd drunk our tea, an enormous explosion took place. I saw bodies on the ground. As we rushed out of the restaurant, I saw wounded civilians and women".

Another possible target was a

group of chiefs having lunch with representatives of Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, to discuss the latest political developments regarding Kirkuk. This group, however, was in another dining room and none of them was hurt.

Because of the crowd, the restaurant guards were unable to thoroughly search families who had come for lunch.

Last October, a member of the Kurdish security forces died and three police were wounded in an attack attributed to the rebellion. In November 2008 a bomb exploded on some wasteland in the town, killing two children and wounding three others. With 55 killed, this latest attack far exceeds the number of casualties caused by the attack that hit a market in Baghdad on 10 November last (28 deaths and dozens of injured) as well as that in the al-Hurriyah quarter (also in Baghdad) on 17 June 2008, which caused 51 deaths and 75 injured. The bloodiest attack of 2008 remains the double suicide bomb attack of 1 February carried out against two of the Iraqi capital's markets, causing 98 deaths and 208 injured.

Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi President, visited the city of Kirkuk the same day. As for the Kurdistan Regional Government, it issued a

communiqué on 13 December vigorously condemning the attack, describing it as an affront to humanity, to democracy and to religion.

The Kurdish government pointed out that, though Kirkuk was outside the Kurdistan Region, it was sending medical teams to the scene and calling on all its Ministries to supply aid if needed. The region's hospitals have been readied to receive those wounded. The Kurdistan Government also sent its condolences to the families of those killed and injured.

A week later, the police found, in Kirkuk, the decapitated body of Nahla Hussein al-Shaly, 17 years old, a leading member of the Kurdish Communist Party's Women's League. According to the police the murderers had shot the young woman and then decapitated her. A spokesman for the Kurdistan Communist Party made the point that Nahla al-Shaly's feminist activity made her an ideal target for islamists.

According to the Kirkuk police's security report for 2008, 214 people had lost their lives in bomb attacks, 196 of them men and 18 women, while 722 had been wounded by them, of which 655 were men and 67 women. Moreover, 61 people had been kidnapped and 11 murdered. The police also recorded 16 suicides.

Of those killed in these attacks, there were 170 civilians, 1 civil servant, 17 police, 17 soldiers, 3 members of security forces and 6 members of the al-Sahwa paramilitary forces. Of those wounded, 131 were police, 36 were soldiers, 3 were members of security forces and 41 were members of al-Sahwa militia. There were also 506 civilians and 5 civil servants injured.

To sum up, the police record having been called out 20,929 times in the course of 2008 for events linked to terrorist activities in Kirkuk.

On 10 December, the Kurdish security forces arrested 8 men suspected of being members of the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group in Suleimaniah Province. *"The Kurdish security forces, in cooperation with other security forces, have succeeded in arresting a group of eight terrorists"*, announced General Hassan Nuri, who commands the Suleimaniah security forces. *"The members of this group are all Kurds who have links with the ansar al-Islam terrorist group. They have admitted intending to perpetrate bomb attacks. We have confiscated some cards and explosives"*.

According to Hassan Nuri, the terrorists planned to use magnetic bombs against political leaders as well as *"chemical products"*.

TURKEY : LEYLA ZANA SENTENCED TO TEN YEARS IMPRISONMENT

The Foreign Affairs Commission of the European Union has warned the Turkish Government following the publication of a report that severely judges the AKP government's record of modernising and democratising the country. The report

particularly highlights the way the political reforms, promised by this party during its re-election in 2007, have been almost completely bogged down "A warning signal has been sent to the Turkish government for it to continue the reforms that have been slowed down over the last three years", commented the

Dutch Social Democrat MEP who drafted the report, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, saying she was expecting actions from Turkey, not just promises.

The report particularly deplores the fact the initial efforts undertaken to reform the Turkish Constitution (the

present one dates from the 1980 military *coup d'état*) just concentrated on the issue of the Islamic headscarf in the universities. The European Union urges the Turkish Government to draw up a new constitution that would guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also called for the political parties and civil society as well as ethnic and religious minorities to be closely associated with the reform process.

On the very day that the report was published, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan, who was visiting Brussels, far from disapproving the calls for reform, actually supported them saying that his country needed "a fundamental revision of the constitution". "This is a reality that we have to accept as such. It is impossible for Turkey to continue forever with this Constitution". In Ali Babacan's opinion, the absence of reform would aggravate the country's internal instability. However, another member of the Government, Cemil Çiçek, Deputy Prime Minister, defended it in the Turkish newspaper *Zaman*, explaining that any change in the constitution had been made "impossible", citing the case where the Constitutional Court had quashed an amendment passed by Parliament lifting the ban on wearing the Islamic headscarf in universities. "The government would, indeed, like to change all the articles in the Constitution, apart

from the four untouchable Articles, but we are the only party ready for this. Wanting is one thing but reality is something else".

If the quashing of this amendment blocks any other reform, according to Cemil Çiçek, this is not a procedural matter but one of "substance". In the view of the Deputy Prime Minister, this precedent opens the way for the quashing of any law passed by Parliament and, in any case, limits the legislative actions of the government: "Changing the Constitution has become, at present, as difficult as moving a mountain".

This decision of the Constitutional Court, dated October 2008, has been strongly criticised in Turkey as an attempt to infringe on Parliament's prerogatives and as a means of blocking any future constitutional reform.

Moreover, Turkey continues to blow hot and cold on the Kurdish question, torn between government promises of liberalisation and the unbending and nit-picking actions of its judiciary, that is always inclined to condemn the Kurdish opposition as a whole.

Thus the former DEP Member of Parliament, Leyla Zana, who had been sentenced to 15 year imprisonment in 1994 for alleged "membership of an armed group" (the PKK) and released in 2004, has again been sentenced to ten years imprisonment for "praising

the PKK" — in fact for having publically said that Abdullah Ocalan was one of the leaders of the Kurdish people. The former Member of Parliament has also been deprived of her vote and forbidden to stand for election, thus eliminating her from the 2009 municipal elections in which she was going to stand for mayor of Diyarbakir.

At the same time, the Turkish government has to decide, in the spring of 2009, whether it will end the solitary confinement of the PKK chief, which is called for by the Council of Europe's Commission against Torture. The Council had visited the prisoner in May 2008 and, in view of "the deterioration in his state of mind" had demanded that his state of isolation be brought to an end. Hitherto Turkey has always refused this. This time, the justice Minister, Mehmet Ali Sahin has let it be understood, on the NTV channel, that some relaxing of his conditions of detention might be considered. "We have started building new housing for the guards at Imrali and this building should be completed in the spring, in May. We will then decide whether or not to send other detainees. We are thinking of increasing the number of detainees in this prison, but no final decision has yet been taken". The number of prisoners sent to the island of Imrali, where Abdullah Ocalan is being held, could be as many as five or six.

SYRIA: A PROPERTY LAW

THAT IS FREEZING THE ECONOMY OF THE KURDISH REGIONS

The Syrian Kurds are protesting against a recently announced law that aims the right to sell or lease land located in border zones. Decree N°49 places severe restrictions

on ownership and use of land bordering Israel and Turkey. Since all the Kurdish regions straddle Syria's borders with Turkey and Iraq, the inhabitants complain that such measures would hinder the local economy.

Indeed, it is decreed that inhabitants of border regions may no longer sell land without having secured prior agreement from the authorities, namely the Ministries of the Interior,

Agriculture and Defence. A similar authorisation would be needed ON renting land for a period of over three years.

According to Radif Mustafa, a lawyer and president of the Kurdish Committee for Human Rights, *"The al-Quneitra border is a special case, since it is at present occupied by Israel, but why are the areas along the Turkish border are covered by this law when Syrio-Turkish relations are better than ever?"*.

Last month over 200 Kurds demonstrated in Damascus against this new regulation. Their protests were peaceful — which did not prevent a brutal reaction by the authorities. Thus, Hirfin Awsi, who was taking part in the demonstration, says he was beaten with iron bars: *"We hadn't said anything against the government or the President. Our protest was peaceful"*.

Loqman Oso is a member of the Azadi Committee, one of seven Kurdish parties that have been protesting publicly against this decree for the last seven months. He states that his party is prepared to continue this kind of demonstration despite the repression: *"We have succeeded in rallying a considerable number of Kurdish parties and we will continue to struggle, peacefully and democratically, until this decree is withdrawn"*.

However, Khaled al-Jarad, who runs the Al-Wahda Press group, which publishes all the Syrian State's official statements, insists that the Kurds have *"misinterpreted"* this law: *"I am greatly saddened, regretful and astonished to see how Decree N°49, which regulates property, is interpreted"*, he declared to the al-Quds Agency. *"It is a decree to regulate property that is not aimed at any specific individual or group but is just concerned with questions of buying and selling. If some*

people among our Kurdish brothers want to exaggerate they will be the losers as no one will believe the way they have interpreted the decree".

Suleiman Ismail points to the confusion reigning in the border regions since the decree was published: *"All legal proceedings regarding property transactions are frozen, because the courts cannot take any decisions on these matters without instructions from the executive, which has not disclosed anything. We have no idea what will happen in the future regarding housing and property in the region"*.

The authorities responsible for carrying out the decree do not seem any better informed, as the Hassake land registration office admits: *"We have received legal notice of the decree and we are asked to carry it out immediately, but we have not received any instructions on how to do this. We have simply been told to stop registering any property transactions"*.

Hence the economic repercussions of such a situation that have made themselves felt since October, as Hussein Abbas, a civil engineer, explains: *"We used to sell a hundred tons of steel a month, but now we barely sell ten. The building firms are not buying any steel or cement since there are no fresh building permits being issued for the moment"*.

Mohammad Salih Salo, a businessman at Qamishlo, confirms that the new law, and the uncertainty which has arisen as a result of it, has dissuaded many people from buying or selling land and real estate: *"Work in the building industry is at a standstill because many people suffer from a lack of confidence. Before we could buy or sell real estate, pay for it and get a building permit. Now people who have money are not buying anything since property transactions can no longer be officially registered in their name. This creates*

problems of trust as between buyers and sellers. We want to secure the necessary permits; we want to work in one way or another. However the administration's offices have received no instructions regarding the new decree so that we are all just waiting".

Some Kurds, because of the economic freeze, have already been forced to emigrate. Mohammad al-Khatib, a carpenter, has a wife and children to keep. He has had to leave home for Damascus and find a job in a shop there: *"I left for Damascus because the firm we were working for had no more work for us. Most of the lads I was working with are from Hassake province and most of them are Kurds. They want to earn a living somehow or other"*.

Despite official denials regarding the hidden aims of such measures, the history of the Kurds in Syria since the 60s, especially in the eastern regions, leads them to be suspicious of a regulation that limits their property rights. In 1962, Syria carried out a policy called *"the Arab belt"* that envisaged expelling the Kurds from the Jezirah, bordering on Turkey, and replacing them with Arab colonies. Nearly 200,000 Kurds were, overnight, deprived of their nationality and declared to be *"foreigners living illegally in Syria"*. Thus status has been passed on to their children, who are this born *"foreign"* to their native land. Thus, a secret Arabisation plan, drawn up in 1963 by the Hassake police and entitled *"A study of Jezirah Province, on its national, social and political aspects"* recommended, amongst other measures, the dispersion of the Syrian Kurds even at the cost of their employment, the setting up of an *"Arab belt"* inhabited by *"pure and nationalist Arabs"* who would live in *"collective farms"*, and in general the suppression of civil rights to all those who did not speak Arabic. Kurdish lands

were this seized and redistributed to Arab colonists and, today, the

issue of the Kurds who have no official status is one of the most

important of the demands of the Kurds in Syria.

TURKEY : MOVING TOWARDS THE OPENING OF KURDISH STUDIES DEPARTMENTS IN THE UNIVERSITIES?

As in the universities of all developed countries, Turkish Universities have departments for the study of the language and civilisations of now extinct civilisations (Sumerian, Hittite Assyrian etc.) and also of living languages throughout the world. However, till now none of the Universities has a department of Armenian or Kurdish. Now the DTP party, though one of its members of Parliament, Osman Özçelik, has proposed the opening of a Kurdish language Department at an Istanbul university — which has not aroused the nationalist uproar that such a suggestion would have caused a few years ago. Questioned on the subject, the President of the Higher Education Council (YOK), Yusuf Ziya Özcsn, replied to the daily paper *Radikal* replied: *“If the Universities make such a proposal we could discuss the question with our friends and do whatever is needful”*.

A department of Armenian

language and literature is due to open shortly at Nevsehir University, which already has a Hebrew language department. As for Greek, there has been such a department at Ankara University since 1936 and at Istanbul since 1983. While no constitutional interdiction prevents the opening of a Department of Kurdish language and literature in principle, a similar request made by HADEP in 2000 had never met with any favourable response. However, signs of a certain easing of tension have appeared more recently, such as the official launching of a Kurdish language TV channel in January, and this time the perspective has not met any open opposition from university circles.

Thus the rector of Ankara University, Cemal Taing, stated: *“If our Faculty of Language, History and Geography suggests opening a Department, we will*

gladly work on the subject”. Naturally, the Universities in Turkish Kurdistan have shown the most enthusiasm and the greatest readiness to open a Kurdish Department. Serdar Bedii Omay, Rector of Mardin University says he is ready now to get down to preparing a project for submission to the YOK. The Rector of Hakkari University, Ibrahim Beleni, has said he is in favour, while the Rector of Sirnak, Ali Akmaz, although in principal his Faculty is dedicated to Science, not literature, has also said he is prepared to welcome a course of Kurdish language and literature: *“A Department of Kurdish language and literature would open in our Faculty of Science and Letters. We do not have a literature faculty yet but when the laws for opening such a department have been published and agreed by the University, I could submit it to the YOK.*

KRG:

EMULATION BETWEEN IRBIL AND SULEIMANIAH

Long considered the most developed city in Iraqi Kurdistan and, in particular the most dynamic one culturally, Suleimaniah is about to be overtaken by Irbil — at least with regard to building and town planning since 2003. In response to remarks about this from local media and observers, the governor of Suleimaniah, Dana Ahmed Majid, has recognised that Irbil, whose urban growth is outstanding in all respects, does indeed seem the more dynamic today. Just after 2003 the two cities had

about the same amount of building work under way. However many of Suleimaniah's projects have not been finished because of delays and unforeseen events, leaving its inhabitants increasingly sceptical and critical of their local administration. These criticisms have been strengthened by Irbil's spectacular activity and even that of former small towns of the province, such as Duhok. Today the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, with its wide avenues its underpasses and its hectic lifestyle is attracting investors on a large scale. However,

questioned by the paper SOMA, Dana Ahmed Majid disputes this supremacy, pointing out other aspects in which, in his view, his city has the advantage over the capital. *“We have completed 90 to 95% of the sewage system, whereas Irbil has yet to renew its own. We have preferred finishing the underground works before starting the surface projects”*. Majid also points out the differences in landscape: *“Suleimaniah is not like Irbil in ground plan. A great deal of their land is flat, which makes the task of identifying potential problems easier — that is not the case with*

Suleimaniah". The governor also pointed out other works, such as infrastructures: "The number of buildings built is not as important as the number of roads that we've built for the well being of our citizens. At the New Year, we announced that six underpasses were going to be built in Suleimaniah and the reasons we have not started one of them is that we are first of all seeking alternative passageways and also because we are looking for a company capable of building them on time".

The governor of Suleimaniah returned to the specific characteristics of the landscape round Suleimaniah: "Where 10 km of roadwork's cost 5 billion Iraqi dinars in Suleimaniah, it only costs 3 billion in Irbil a their land is flatter than ours, thus needing less digging and less labour".

The impressive development of the Kurdistan Region since the overthrow of the Baathist regime is one of the striking features of the Kurdish area that, in addition its security, distinguish it from the rest of Iraq. The law on foreign investments, passed in 2006, had the aim of stimulating this expansion with arrival of capital by measures very favourable to private companies. A fact that Governor Majid regrets to some extent: "There is a part of the law that I, personally, consider mistaken. The law was drafted so that all the profits go

to the investors and nothing to the government nor the population. The investment projects have all been arranged in such a way that they receive secure land, water, electricity while paying no taxes — sometimes even the equipment is given to them. Their activity takes place without any contract (for example regarding prices), which is a mistake. Not receiving taxes, the government gives them everything without getting anything in return. Moreover they employ foreign staff, so that our population doesn't get any advantage from it". Despite these reservations, Dana Majid recognises that the Kurdistan Regional Government could not long survive without the investments from abroad.

On the other hand, the agricultural sector, the most devastated area since the *Anfal* campaign in which 90% was destroyed by the scorched earth and village destruction policy ordered by Saddam Hussein, is timidly beginning to revive, as is noticeable on the local market place. The Kurdish government has decided to support this activity in the year 2009.

"This year the Suleimaniah Governorate has bought 16 million US dollars worth of barley for the farmers so that they can feed their cattle and 8 million US dollars worth of wheat was given for planting. To help them through the drought we spent 23 billion Iraqi dinars to provide water for the hardest hit regions".

Although these initiatives to help local production have had a certain impact in improving agricultural production, the Kurdish farmers still have difficulty in the market place because of competition from foreign imports. "Last year at Penwin, there was an abundant tomato crop. The farmers had dug irrigation wells: they needed electric generator sets and lots of fuel. Thus they spent a great deal to produce. However, when they came to the market, they could not drop their prices. Iranian tomatoes were so much cheaper that we had hurriedly to issue a decree to stop import long enough to enable local production to be sold".

Without government support the Kurdish producers would still be unable to face foreign competition: "The Ministry of Agriculture has set up a Five-year plan costly 10 billion US dollars to complete all the projects under way for the duration of this period. But this exceeds the Regional Government's resources and it has had to have recourse of a loan". The Suleimaniah Governorate has asked for a budget of 700 billion Iraqi dinars from Irbil to fully carry out their development plans. Meanwhile, certain plans are already under way: at Penwin, Kalar, Halabja, and Qala Dize. A vast development project in planned in Chamchamal for 2009 and a company is due to come and explore Hawraman to set up a tourist programme.

KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT (KRG) : AN EXHIBITION TO COMMEMORATE ANFAL AT SULEIMANIAH

For the second time, Ali al-Majid, alias "Chemical Ali", Saddam Hussein's cousin and a major actor in the Kurdish genocide campaign, has been sentenced to death for "crimes against humanity and premeditated murder", this time for the massacre of Shiite Arabs in 1991, during the reprisals against

the uprising against the Baathist regime. He had already been sentenced to death last year for having ordered the deaths of 182,000 Kurds during the so-called *Anfal* operation, that is on 24 July 2008. That sentence was confirmed last September.

Now 67 years of age, Ali Hassan

al-Majid was Minister of the Interior under the Baath regime. He was also military governor of Kuwait following its invasion by Iraq in August 1990.

Abdulghani Abdul Ghafur, the Baath leader responsible for the South of Iraq was also sentenced to death on the same grounds.

The verdict, however, has to be sent to the Iraqi Supreme Court that could quash the sentence.

Four other defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment; 6 to 15 years jail and three were acquitted. They faced the same charges, but the court spared their lives after they had offered their *"apologies and regret"* — which was not the case of Ali al-Majid and, especially of Abdel Ghafur, who was extremely vindictive and threatening throughout the trial.

The former assistant chief of operations of the Armed Forces, Rashid al-Tikriti, and General Sultan Hashem al-Tai, former Minister of Defence, were respectively sentenced to life imprisonment and fifteen years.

At the same time, an exhibition on the *Anfal* operation opened in the Kurdish city of Suleimaniah.

This is principally intended to teach the young Kurds about the genocide and their past. Amongst the pieces of material evidence is a rope used to hang thousands of Kurds, victims of the former regime. The exhibition's commissioner, Abdelkarim Ali Haldani, who also manages the Suleimaniah branch of the Autonomous Region's Martyrs Foundation, cited the figure of 16,000 victims in the province, dying under torture or executed in the Baathist prisons. These facts need to be reminded to the new generation of Kurds, too young to remember the former regime's repressions or even to have lived through it. *"There is a new generation of Kurds who have never experienced oppression and this exhibition will let them know the lives of their elders under an iniquitous regime. Those who do not respect the past can have no future"*,

declared Jamal Agha, assistant to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to the AFP news agency.

As well as *"Chemical Ali's rope"*, a highly symbolic object that sets the tone of the exhibition, official documents of the Baathist State are exhibited, such as death sentences, but also evidence of the daily lives of those in the regime's prisons: letters by prisoners, object made by detainees such as a chess set. Osman Said, 40 years of age, and nicknamed *"Osman the prisoner"*, was detained five years in Abu Ghaib: *"This exhibition expresses the sufferings of hundreds of thousands of Kurds, Arabs and Turcomen who sacrificed everything to fight the unjust and oppressive old regime. It reminds me of my days in captivity. From my cell I saw those condemned to death waiting for execution. Amongst them were some of my best friends"*

BELGIUM:

A KURDISH FILMMAKER WINS A PRIZE

Filmmaker Sahin Omar Kalifa won the prize for the best film at the Louvain International Festival of short films, in Belgium, for his film *"Nan"* (Bread). The jury's decision made public on 6 December. In addition to the prestige, the prize is worth 60,000 euros.

"Nan" relates the story of a Kurdish family. Saman and Alan are two brothers, living with their respective mothers, Nazdar and Hemze, who send them out on the streets to steal and beg. One day Saman meets an old man who wants to help the

family. But it tries to exploit the situation.

Sahin Omar Kalifa was born in Zakho, in Iraqi Kurdistan, in 1980. He made his first film at the age of seventeen. An immigrant in Belgium since 2001, he entered the Saint Lucas film school, in Brussels, in 2004. He has since made 14 short films. One of them *"Ava rush"* (Black water) won a prize in 2007 at the first Melbourne Kurdish Film Festival, in Australia.

In this same month, three other Kurdish filmmakers had showings at the 13th Kerala

International Film Festival, in India: *"Niwe Mange"* (Half Moon) by the Iranian Kurdish film director Bahman Ghobadi; *"Refugees"*, a Turkish, German and Kurdish film by Reis Çelik and *"Gitmek"* also called *"My Marion and my Brando"* by Huseyin Karabey.

Furthermore, the critics of the well-known British daily *The Times* have published a list of the *"100 best films"* screened in Great Britain during 2008. Ghobadi's *"Niwe Mange"* was among those selected. This film has also won the *"Golden Shell"* award — and been banned in Iran ...

Iraq pact has many uncertainties

By Steven Lee Myers

WASHINGTON: The security agreements between Iraq and the United States mark the beginning of the end of the war. They are only the beginning, though, and the terms of the agreements create uncertainties that could disrupt the smooth withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

The agreements — a broad “strategic framework” and a more detailed security pact that were approved Thursday by the Iraqi Parliament — set a deadline that critics of the war have long wanted. They require that all U.S. forces withdraw from Iraq no later than Dec. 31, 2011, but they offer no timetable for withdrawals and in theory could add three more years to a war that has already lasted five and a half.

The United States has also agreed to remove all combat forces from Iraqi cities and villages by the end of June, though the agreements remain silent on what constitutes “combat” troops and where exactly they will move. Those decisions have been left to a Joint Military Operations Coordination Committee, a body of Americans and Iraqis that could prove to be as ungainly as its acronym, Jmocc.

The committee will have the authority to approve U.S. military operations, the use of bases and facilities, the detention of Iraqis by U.S. forces and even — in rare cases, it would seem — the prosecution of U.S. troops accused of “grave premeditated felonies” committed while off duty and off base. Any number of circumstances could strain cooperation and even lead to conflict.

“Question marks remain in the agreement concerning freedom of action for U.S. soldiers, vague security commitments and protection of Iraqi assets,” Travis Sharp, a defense analyst at the Council for a Livable World, an advocacy group, wrote after Parliament voted.

The council has long opposed the war, but tellingly, it expressed support for the agreements. The reason is that the vagueness of some of the terms and definitions also gives President-elect

But vagueness gives Obama flexibility

Barack Obama a fair amount of flexibility to carry out his campaign promises to end the war.

That opponents of the war support the agreements is a victory for President George W. Bush, albeit a mixed one. It is also a vindication of Obama’s insistence on establishing a timetable to withdraw, forcing the Americans and the Iraqis to contemplate a time without foreign troops there.

Already U.S. commanders have begun considering how to accelerate withdrawals of combat brigades on a schedule much closer to Obama’s than seemed possible a year ago. At the same time, the agreements leave room for keeping in place a larger contingent than Obama’s supporters might have envisioned, with tens of thousands of U.S. troops remaining in roles including training and other support, at least for the time being.

Brooke Anderson, a policy adviser and spokeswoman for Obama’s transition office, welcomed Iraq’s approval of the agreements, saying that the Obama team was “encouraged to see progress” in establishing the conditions for a U.S. presence beyond the expiration of the UN mandate at the end of the year.

The reason the agreements are a victory for Bush is that his administration has effectively negotiated an end to a costly and widely unpopular war that was begun in 2003 with several rationales, the most alarming of which — eliminating unconventional weapons supposedly held by Saddam Hussein — has been discredited.

In the waning months of his presidency, Bush had to drop his initial opposition to any firm deadlines for U.S. withdrawal — deadlines that Obama urged on the campaign trail — and agree to Iraqi demands to have a greater and greater say in their country’s governance in the meantime.

“Given where we were in January 2007, we have seen an almost unthinkable pace of progress on political, eco-

nomics and security issues,” Bush’s spokesman, Gordon Johndroe, said in a statement, describing the agreements as evidence of the success of the president’s strategy. “So much so that the improved conditions allowed us to come to this mutual agreement with a sovereign Iraq that is solving its problems in the political process, not with guns and bombs.”

The concessions to Iraqi sovereignty that Bush accepted have raised concerns among prominent Democrats in the U.S. Congress, including Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Ike Skelton, his counterpart in the House of Representatives.

But any withdrawal from Iraq was inevitably going to accompany stronger assertions of Iraqi sovereignty and thus an uncertain period of transition in which real operational control passes from the military of the United States to that of Iraq. Article 9 of the agreement governing security forces, for example, gives Iraq control of its airspace for the first time since the first Gulf war but goes on to say that Iraq may request “temporary support” from the United States.

Still unclear is how many U.S. forces are expected to remain between now and the deadline for withdrawal, and whether any could stay beyond then. What is clear is that beginning on Jan. 1, when the agreements go into effect, U.S.-led operations in Iraq will be conducted under far greater restraints.

As part of the effort to win passage from Parliament, the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki also agreed to hold a national referendum next year on the agreements. A vote against them would put the U.S. forces then in Iraq — almost certainly more than 100,000 troops — in a legal limbo without the UN mandate the agreements are intended to replace at the end of this year.

“It is quite apparent that the Bush administration will be leaving the Obama administration with a messy, complicated and unstable situation in Iraq,” said the National Security Network, a policy group made up mostly of Democrats who have sharply criticized Bush’s policies.

It has also left Obama a way out.

Thomas L. Friedman

The Iraq Obama inherits

Here's a story you don't see very often. Iraq's highest court told the Iraqi Parliament last Monday that it had no right to strip one of its members of immunity so he could be prosecuted for an alleged crime: visiting Israel for a seminar on counterterrorism. The Iraqi justices said the Sunni lawmaker, Mithal al-Alusi, had committed no crime and told the Parliament to back off.

That's not all. The Iraqi newspaper *Al-Umma al-Iraqiyya* carried an open letter signed by 400 Iraqi intellectuals, both Kurdish and Arab, defending al-Alusi. That takes a lot of courage and a lot of press freedom. I can't imagine any other Arab country today where independent judges would tell the government it could not prosecute a parliamentarian for visiting Israel — and intellectuals would openly defend him in the press.

In the case of Iraq, though, the federal high court, in a unanimous decision, vacated the Parliament's rescinding of Alusi's immunity, with the decision delivered personally by Chief Justice Medhat al-Mahmoud. The decision explained that although a 1950s-era law made traveling to Israel a crime punishable by death, Iraq's new Constitution establishes freedom to travel. Therefore the Parliament's move was "illegal and unconstitutional because the current constitution does not prevent citizens from traveling to any country in the world," Abdul-Sattar Bayrkdar, spokesman for the court, told *The Associated Press*. The judgment even made the Parliament speaker responsible for the expenses of the court and the defense counsel!

I don't think it's reasonable to expect Iraq to have relations with Israel anytime soon, but the fact that it may be developing an independent judiciary is good news. It's a reminder of the most important reason for the Iraq war: to try to collaborate with Iraqis to build progressive politics

For the first time, there is a chance that a reasonably stable democratizing government can take root.

and rule of law in the heart of the Arab-Muslim world, a region that stands out for its lack of consensual politics and independent judiciaries. And it's a reminder that a decent outcome may still be possible in Iraq, especially now that the Parliament has endorsed the U.S.-Iraqi plan for a 2011 withdrawal of American troops.

Al Qaeda has not been fully defeated in Iraq; suicide bombings are still an almost daily reality. But it has been dealt a severe blow, which I believe is one reason the jihadists — those brave warriors who specialize in killing women and children and defenseless tourists — have turned their attention to softer targets like India.

Just as they tried to stoke a Shiite-Sunni civil war in Iraq, and failed, they are now trying to stoke a Hindu-Muslim civil war in India.

If Iraq can keep improving — still uncertain — and become a place where Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites can write their own social contract and live together with a modicum of stability, it could one day become a strategic asset for the United States in the post-9/11 effort to promote different politics in the Arab-Muslim world.

How so? Iraq is a geopolitical space that for the last three decades of the 20th century was dominated by a Baathist dictatorship, which, though it provided a bulwark against Iranian expansion, did so at the cost of a regime that murdered tens of thousands of its own people and attacked three of its neighbors.

In 2003, the United States, under President Bush, invaded Iraq to change the regime. Terrible postwar execution and unrelenting attempts by Al Qaeda to provoke a Sunni-Shiite civil war turned the Iraqi geopolitical space into a different problem — a maelstrom of violence. A huge price was paid by Iraqis and Americans. This was the Iraq that Barack Obama ran against.

In the last year, though, the U.S. troop surge and the backlash from moderate Iraqi Sunnis against Al Qaeda and Iraqi Shiites against pro-Iranian extremists have brought a new measure of stability. There is now, for the first time, a chance that a reasonably stable democratizing government, though no doubt corrupt in places, can take root in the Iraqi political space.

That is the Iraq that Obama is inheriting. It is an Iraq where we have to begin drawing down our troops — because the occupation has gone on too long and because we have now committed to do so by treaty — but it is also an Iraq that has the potential to eventually tilt the Arab-Muslim world in a different direction.

I'm sure that Obama, whatever he said during the campaign, will play this smart. He has to avoid giving Iraqi leaders the feeling that Bush did — that he'll wait forever for them to sort out their politics — while also not suggesting that he is leaving tomorrow, so they all start stockpiling weapons.

If he can pull this off, and help that decent Iraq take root, Obama and the Democrats could not only end the Iraq war but salvage something positive from it. Nothing would do more to enhance the Democratic Party's national security credentials than that.



IRAK: LES SOLDATS SUD-CORÉENS FONT LEURS ADIEUX À L'IRAK

ERBIL (Irak), 1 déc 2008 (AFP)

LES SOLDATS sud-coréens ont fait lundi leurs adieux à l'Irak, après avoir passé quatre ans au Kurdistan irakien, une région relativement protégée par rapport au reste du pays, a constaté le journaliste de l'AFP.

A l'ouest d'Erbil, dans le camp "Zeitoun", signifiant "olive" en arabe, et dont le nom a été choisi parce que ce fruit symbolise la paix, des responsables américains, kurdes et irakiens ont assisté à un défilé militaire.

Le chef des forces américaines en Irak, le général Raymond Odierno, dont la présence avait été auparavant annoncée par l'état-major sud-coréen, n'assistait pas à la cérémonie. Il y était représenté par son adjoint, le général Lloyd James Austin.

Les hymnes nationaux irakien et sud-coréen ont été joués et un défilé de troupes irakiennes, du Kurdistan irakien et sud-coréennes a suivi.

Le retrait sud-coréen devrait être achevé le 20 décembre.

La Corée du Sud avait dépêché 3.600 soldats en Irak en 2004. Le mandat du contingent avait été prorogé à quatre reprises mais ses effectifs progressivement rognés pour être ramenés à 650 hommes.

Le contingent dépêché par Séoul à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien dans le nord de l'Irak, a notamment construit 61 écoles, 15 centres de soins et 87 installations d'irrigation.

Plus de 87.000 personnes ont bénéficié de soins médicaux gratuits.



1 décembre 2008

Attentats contre la police à Bagdad et Mossoul, 30 morts

BAGDAD - Quatre attentats à l'explosif visant la police irakienne ont fait une trentaine de morts et des dizaines de blessés lundi à Bagdad et à Mossoul, dans le nord du pays.

Dans l'est de Bagdad, une bombe a explosé puis un kamikaze s'est fait sauter devant l'entrée d'une école de police où de jeunes recrues formaient une file d'attente. Selon la police, ce double attentat a fait 15 morts et 45 blessés.

Peu après, toujours selon la police, l'explosion d'une voiture piégée et un attentat suicide visant une patrouille mixte irako-américaine ont fait 15 morts et 37 blessés à Mossoul, que les autorités présentent comme le dernier bastion d'Al Qaïda. L'armée américaine a dit n'avoir subi aucune perte.

Auparavant, dans le nord de Bagdad, le général Moudhar al Maoula, chargé de superviser d'intégration dans l'armée des milices sunnites supplétives de l'armée américaine, a été grièvement blessé dans



Deux explosions, l'une due à une voiture piégée, l'autre déclenchée par un kamikaze, ont fait au moins 15 morts et 45 blessés lundi près de l'école de police de Bagdad, dans l'est de la capitale irakienne. (Reuters/Thaier al Sudani)

l'explosion d'une bombe au passage de son convoi.

L'attentat contre le général, dans le quartier de Soulaïkh, a tué son chauffeur

ainsi que deux civils et fait 13 blessés. Selon une source proche des services de sécurité, le frère du général Maoula figurerait parmi les morts.

Près de Kirkouk, ville du nord que se disputent Arabes, Kurdes et Turkmènes, la police a déclaré avoir découvert une fosse commune contenant 12 cadavres non identifiés, certains brûlés, d'autre portant des traces de balles.

Le nombre de civils tués dans les violences en novembre en Irak est en hausse par rapport au mois précédent, en raison de plusieurs attentats à la bombe, mais celui des soldats américains tués est le plus bas depuis le début de la guerre en 2003, selon un bilan établi par les autorités irakiennes.

En novembre, 296 civils ont été tués, contre 238 en octobre et 538 en novembre 2007. Six militaires américains ont trouvé la mort en opération, contre sept en octobre et 29 en novembre 2007.



RAID AÉRIEN TURC CONTRE DES CIBLES KURDES DANS LE NORD DE L'IRAK (ARMÉE)

ANKARA, 1 déc 2008 (AFP) -

DES AVIONS de l'armée turque ont bombardé lundi des positions de rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé l'état-major général dans un communiqué publié à Ankara.

Le raid visait des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans la zone de Zap, dans la région du nord de l'Irak contrôlée par les Kurdes, selon le communiqué de l'état-major général diffusé sur son site Internet.

Tous les avions ont regagné leur base après avoir accompli leur mission, a ajouté le communiqué.

Le précédent raid aérien avait été mené le 28 octobre.

En octobre, le Parlement turc a prolongé d'un an son mandat au gouvernement l'autorisant à mener des opérations militaires transfrontalières contre les

bases irakiennes du PKK.

Selon Ankara, quelque 2.000 rebelles du PKK sont retranchés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak où ils peuvent circuler facilement et recevoir armes et explosifs utilisés pour des attentats commis en Turquie.

Quelque 44.000 personnes ont été tuées dans les affrontements entre rebelles kurdes et forces de sécurité turques depuis 1984.

La Turquie a souvent accusé Bagdad de tolérer, voire d'aider le PKK, considéré par les Etats-Unis, l'Union européenne et la Turquie comme une organisation terroriste.

Le gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien (nord), en particulier, est régulièrement soupçonné par Ankara de condamner publiquement mais de tolérer dans les faits les activités du PKK.

REUTERS

Une bombe explose devant une permanence de l'AKP à Istanbul

1 décembre 2008

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Six personnes, dont quatre policiers, ont été blessées lundi à Istanbul dans l'explosion d'une bombe devant une permanence de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir issu de la mouvance islamiste modérée, a annoncé le gouverneur de la capitale économique turque, Muammer Guler.

Quatre policiers, dont deux sont dans un état critique, font partie des blessés, de même que deux employés de l'AKP.

L'explosion s'est produite vers 15h00 locales (13h00 GMT) dans le quartier de Sutluce, sur la rive européenne du Bosphore.

Les enquêteurs pensent que l'engin explosif, qui a soufflé les vitres de l'entrée du bâtiment sans provoquer de dégâts structurels, était dissimulé dans un colis.

L'attentat n'a pas été, pour le moment, revendiqué mais par le passé, des séparatistes kurdes, des groupuscules d'extrême gauche et des islamistes ont fait sauter des bombes à Istanbul.

Par ailleurs, trois personnes ont été tuées et 17 autres blessées dans l'explosion due à une fuite de gaz survenue dans un bâtiment administratif de la province de Kocaeli, voisine d'Istanbul, ont annoncé les autorités.

Le Monde 2 décembre 2008

"Ali le chimique" condamné à mort pour la deuxième fois

ALI HASSAN AL-MAJID, connu sous le surnom d'"Ali le Chimique" après son recours aux armes chimiques contre les Kurdes, a été condamné à la peine capitale, mardi 2 décembre, par un tribunal à Bagdad, pour la répression de l'insurrection chiite en 1991. Le Haut Tribunal pénal irakien, qui siège dans la "zone verte", fortement sécurisée, au cœur de la capitale irakienne, a également prononcé la peine de mort contre Abdel Ghani Abdel Ghafour, chef du parti Baas dans le sud de l'Irak au moment de l'insurrection.

Cousin de l'ancien dictateur Saddam Hussein, Ali Hassan Al-Majid, 67 ans, était à l'époque ministre de l'intérieur, après avoir été gouverneur militaire du Koweït envahi par l'Irak en août 1990. L'écrasement du soulèvement avait fait jusqu'à 100 000 victimes dans les provinces chiites du sud du pays, selon l'accusation. Menée par des soldats démoralisés par la déroute de l'armée irakienne au Koweït et des civils, la rébellion avait été matée dans le sang



rébellion avait été matée dans le sang par les troupes d'élite du régime baasiste, sans que les forces étrangères déployées dans la région interviennent. La mutinerie, commencée à Bassora, s'était transformée en révolte populaire et avait gagné toutes les villes du Sud, notamment Nad-

jaf et Kerbala, centres religieux chiites.

C'est la seconde fois en dix-huit mois qu'Ali Hassan Al-Majid est condamné à mort. Le 24 juin, c'est pour le massacre de 182 000 Kurdes d'Irak dans les années 1980 qu'il s'était vu infliger la peine capitale. Ces opérations, baptisées Anfal, avaient été lancées en 1987 et 1988 avec l'utilisation de bombardements chimiques. Cette sentence avait été confirmée en appel le 4 septembre par la Cour suprême irakienne.

Le verdict sera envoyé à la Cour suprême, qui a le pouvoir de casser la décision. Ali Hassan Al-Majid s'est seulement exclamé à l'annonce de sa sentence : "Merci à Dieu", comme il l'avait fait lors de sa précédente condamnation à mort. Le procès de ces anciens responsables du régime de Saddam Hussein avait commencé le 21 août.

AFP

SOULEIMANIYEH, LA CORDE DU PENDU RELIE LES KURDES À LEUR PASSÉ

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 4 déc 2008 (AFP)

LA CORDE utilisée jadis pour le gibet de la plus terrible des prisons de Saddam Hussein est la pièce maîtresse d'une exposition ouverte mercredi à Souleimaniyeh, dans le nord de l'Irak, pour faire connaître aux jeunes Kurdes l'histoire tragique de leur peuple.

"Elle permet aux habitants de cette région de garder en mémoire ceux qui ont sacrifié leur vie pour la liberté et l'avènement de la démocratie", assure le conservateur Abdelkarim Ali Haldani.

Ce dernier, qui dirige la Fondation des Martyrs de la région autonome de Souleimaniyeh, l'une des trois provinces du Kurdistan irakien, espère que cela servira à l'éducation de la nouvelle génération.

M. Haldani estime que 16.000 personnes originaires de la seule province de Souleimaniyeh ont été torturées à mort ou exécutées dans les prisons irakiennes avant l'invasion ayant renversé le régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003.

Selon Bakhtiar Amine, l'ancien ministre irakien des droits de l'Homme, plus de 100.000 personnes ont été suppliciées ou exécutées durant le 24 ans du régime de Saddam Hussein dans les prisons irakiennes, dont la pire fut Abou Ghraïb, située à Khan Dari, à 25 km à l'ouest de Bagdad.

"Chaque lundi et mercredi, ils exécutaient puis faisaient payer à la famille le prix de la balle fatale", dit à l'AFP M. Amine.

Depuis 2003, les Kurdes jouissent d'un sort enviable car leur territoire autonome du nord de l'Irak n'a pas connu des attentats et des combats confession-

nels comparables à ceux qui ont ensanglanté le reste du pays.

Cet événement culturel vise principalement les Kurdes nés après 1991, date à partir de laquelle les Etats-unis et la Grande-Bretagne ont interdit à l'aviation irakienne de survoler le nord de l'Irak.

"Il existe une nouvelle génération de Kurdes qui n'ont jamais connu l'oppression et cette exposition leur fera connaître la vie de leurs aînés sous un régime inique. Ceux qui ne respectent pas le passé n'ont pas d'avenir", déclare Jamal Agha, collaborateur du président irakien Jalal Talabani, un Kurde.

Des objets liés à l'appareil sécuritaire de l'ancien régime sont présentés, comme des ordres d'exécution, des lettres et objets confectionnés par les détenus durant leur captivité, dont un jeu d'échec.

Pour les plus âgés, dont des anciens prisonniers, c'est une plongée dans la douleur. Osmane Saïd, 40 ans, surnommé "Osmane le prisonnier" car il a passé cinq ans à Abou Ghraïb, a perdu des amis pendus avec la corde désormais montrée au public.

"Cette exposition exprime la souffrance de centaines de milliers de Kurdes, d'Arabes et de Turcomans qui ont tout sacrifié pour combattre l'ancien régime injuste et oppresseur", dit-il.

"Cela me rappelle mes jours de captivité. Je voyais de ma cellule des condamnés à mort attendant leur exécution. Parmi eux figuraient mes meilleurs amis", explique Osmane.

Does the Status of Forces Agreement Spell Doom for Kurds?

United Press International

December 01, 2008 By Inter Press Service

Mohammed A. Sallih

COLUMBIA, Missouri: Kurds are divided over a security pact between Iraq and the US, approved by a large majority in the Iraqi Parliament on Thursday, in what appears to be a potential heavy blow to their major gains since the US-led invasion of the country in 2003.

Despite the international media's portrayal of unequivocal unified Kurdish support for the deal, there is an increasing realization within formal and informal Kurdish circles that the Kurds are dooming themselves by approving the deal.

During a meeting with US President George W. Bush last month, Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani described the pact as being "in the interests of the Iraqi government - it's in the interests of this country, and we have been and will continue to support it and support its ratification.

"Kurdish leaders have very fervently talked about approving the agreement and have appeared to be like the number one attorneys for this deal," Nawshirwan Mustafa, a former deputy to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, wrote in Sbeiy, a Kurdish news website he founded.

Mustafa resigned from Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan after disagreements over the party management style.

"They [Kurdish leaders] have thought they should unconditionally support whatever America does and consider it as good," he wrote.

The pact, officially termed a withdrawal agreement, requires the US to pull out all its forces from Iraq's land, waters and air by the end of 2011. That will bring to an end eight years of US occupation of Iraq.

Now, the extent of fears are such that senior Kurdish MPs broke their silence in the past few days demanding amendments to the deal in a way that would curb the central government's hand in using the country's military to "settle scores" with its political opponents. What makes it even more worrying for Kurds is that the deal commits the US military to back the Iraqi Army in its operations.

But Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has firmly rejected any changes, saying that parliamentarians should either accept the deal in its entirety or reject it altogether.

Kurdish leaders' support for the deal emanates from an assumption that the presence of US forces in the country for a longer time will be in their interests. But ironically, there are provisions in the deal that can ensnare Kurds and jeopardize their political future.

One such provision about preserving Iraq's "territorial integrity" - through US assistance - is believed by many Kurds to be clearly aimed at their independence-seeking tendencies.

Preserving "territorial integrity" has been the classic code-phrase various governments in the region have used to crush Kurdish secessionist movements, such as in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria, where sizeable restive Kurdish populations live. No other force has ever been deemed as strong a threat to Iraq's territorial integrity as Kurds since the establishment of the country in early 1920s.

Some Kurdish MPs demanded that an "honor pact" be signed among all Iraqi factions that would prevent the central government or any faction from using force to determine the outcome of political disagreements.

Sirwan Zahawi, a Kurdish lawmaker, told Kurdish Peyamner news agency that among priorities for Kurds are that central government should not send its army to Kurdistan or any of the disputed territories between Kurds and Arabs. Disputed territories are large swaths of land rich with natural resources like oil that the Iraqi central and semi-autonomous Kurdish governments disagree over who should control them.

Kurds control only the three northern provinces of Irbil, Dohuk and Suleimaniyya known as Kurdistan, but have a strong presence in the disputed territories.

The security deal, officially termed the agreement of the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, also contains several references to the US and Iraqi troops jointly combating "outlawed" armed groups.

Such phrases have raised alarms among Kurds as to how they might be interpreted in the future. While tensions between Shiite and Sunni sects have considerably eased over the past year, those between Kurds and Baghdad have dramatically increased. There are several thorny unsettled issues between Baghdad and Kurds such as territory and oil disputes that at any time might erupt in violence.

Last August, Kurdish armed forces known as Peshmerga and the Iraqi Army were on the brink of a conflict in areas north of volatile Diyala Province. During those tensions, Sami al-Askari, a close aide to Maliki, termed Kurdish Peshmargas present in Diyala "outlawed militias."

Tensions were defused then through US mediation. But if the SOFA takes effect, Kurds will find themselves not only on the opposite side of the trench against the Iraqi Army, but US troops as well. That means Kurds will risk antagonizing their major ally in the country.

The deal requires the US to help bring Iraq out of "Chapter Seven" status at the United Nations, which recognized Iraq as a threat to international peace and security in 1991 when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. That will allow Iraq to more easily procure advanced weaponry for its army, something over which Kurdish officials have publicly expressed concern.

Last September, Kurdish parliamentary Speaker Adnan Mufti asked the Iraqi government to give guarantees that it will not use such weapons against Kurds. Today, the major military challenge to the country's army is no longer the Mehdi Army or Al-Qaeda, but Kurds. Amid increasing fears among Kurds about the stakes of this agreement, some have called for an alternative by reviving a UN resolution that committed the international community to protecting Kurds in Iraq. However, the mainstream Kurdish leadership has not agreed to that.

The UN Security Council passed Resolution 688 in 1991 when the Iraqi Army targeted Kurdish civilians during their uprising against Saddam Hussein. The resolution provided international protection for Kurds by setting up a safe haven in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq.

Experts say it is still legally effective. Saadi Barzinji, a senior Kurdish lawmaker in Baghdad, believes Kurds can try to resort to Resolution 688, but not as long as the security deal has any chances of passing.

"If the situation in Iraq got disrupted, then Kurds can ask the same forces who protected them before under Resolution 688 to do the same," Barzinji told IPS in a phone interview from Baghdad. "This means we might even have to ask for the establishment of a US military base in Kurdistan."



December 3, 2008

Kurdish PM calls on South Korean companies to invest in Kurdistan

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq: Kurdish Prime Minister Negervan Barzani on Wednesday called on the South Korean companies to invest in Kurdistan, expressing hope for the continuation of relations between the two countries after the withdrawal of the Korean troops. Speaking at a ceremony marking the end of the mission of the South Korean forces stationed in the Kurdistan region, Barzani said "I hope that the withdrawal of South Korean forces will not be a reason to cut relations between the two countries and I call on the South Korean companies to use the chance and invest in our

region." For his part the commander of the South Korean troops said "our presence in Kurdistan region has an important indication and we thank the Kurdish government for its cooperation during our presence." "The troops will start leaving Arbil between December 11-14 heading for Kuwait then they will leave Kuwait on December 20," he told Aswat al-Iraq. A total 3,566 South Korean troops had stationed in the Iraqi Kurdistan region in September 2004.

Constitution reason behind al-Maliki-Kurds disagreement - analysts

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Two political analysts said that the constitutional clauses are the main reason behind the disagreement between the federal government and the government of the Kurdistan region, while another one described what is going on now between the two sides as "indirect negotiations on the Iraqi style."

"The main reason for the accusations between federal and Kurdish governments is that each side understands the situation according to a certain vision and reading of the constitution," Saad al-Hadithi told Aswat al-Iraq, noting that the reason is the constitution itself because the way it was written is so vague.

"Disagreement will continue for a long time because the contradicting understanding of the authorities given to the region and the federal government," he noted.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on Monday said that the duty of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is to create national unity and promote tolerance, adding that the establishment of support councils will bring instability and divisions in Kurdish society.

The statement was made in response to statements made by Maliki during a Baghdad-based press conference on November 20 in which he allegedly criticized the regional government's stance on many issues.

Media adviser to Premier Nouri al-Maliki on Monday said that the Iraqi federal government will respond to the points mentioned by the release issued by Kurdistan's regional cabinet through an official release that will be issued by

al-Maliki.

"The release that will be issued by the premier will represent an official response," Yaseen Majeed told Aswat al-Iraq.

Meanwhile, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said there is a disagreement between the presidency and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki about forming support councils, noting that the issue was sent to the constitutional court which will decide the legality of forming these councils.

For his part, Ribien Rasoul, a Kurdish political analyst, said there are problems between al-Maliki's government and the Kurdish one regarding the authorities of the federal government.

"Media arguments will not solve the issue," he underlined.

Political research and analyst Muhanad al-Ushieqar said "what is going on between the two governments is a sort of negotiations in the Iraqi way not mutual accusations."

"Al-Maliki should defend the Iraqi government because it has its private interests and Kurds should defend their rights and the rights of the people who make them rule," he added.

the relation between Baghdad and Kurdistan region witnesses disagreements over forming the support councils in the disputed areas, oil contracts with the foreign companies as well as solving the disputed areas problem.

Relatives meet remains of Kurds found in mass graves

The remains of 150 found in southern Iraq are met at the airport in Irbil. There is a ceremony, but also disappointment for many.

By Asso Ahmed

Reporting from Irbil, Iraq -- For more than 20 years, Aska Ali Ameen waited for her husband to come home. She knew he was dead, but getting his corpse would be better than having nothing. At least she could give him a decent burial.

When Ameen finally got a peek inside the coffin given to her by government officials, though, she felt no relief.

"As I look inside the coffin, I wonder, is the man inside my husband or not?" said Ameen, standing on an airport tarmac where the coffins of 150 long-deceased Kurds had just been unloaded from a cargo plane in the northern city of Irbil, capital of the semiautonomous Kurdistan region.

After so many years, Shareef Ali's remains were like the others that arrived from Najaf last month: bones and dust.

There were no shreds of clothing, no jewelry, nothing personal -- only a slip of paper stating that an identification document proved these were Ali's remains.

An estimated 180,000 Kurds died in the 1980s in what came to be known as the Anfal campaign, or "spoils of war." The campaign included gas attacks on the Kurds' northern homeland and the transfer of Kurds to southern Iraq, where many were killed.

As with most of the crackdowns designed to bolster President Saddam Hussein's Sunni Arab-led dictatorship, most victims were civilians.

The remains of Anfal victims have stayed beneath the country's sandy soil, in the deep



Kurdish soldiers in Irbil, Iraq, carry one of 150 coffins containing the remains of Kurds killed during Saddam Hussein's Anfal campaign of the 1980s. The remains, found in a mass grave in southern Iraq, were flown north for relatives to receive them.

holes where the Kurds fell after being gunned down. Identification cards are mixed among bones or tucked in pockets of whatever remains of clothing.

Since Hussein's ouster in 2003, the graves have been uncovered one by one. So many, in fact, that the Iraqi government has designated May 16 as Mass Graves Day, a national day of remembrance.

The latest discovery was about three months

ago in a farmer's field near Najaf. Many of the bodies were identified through documentation found nearby. For others, there were no clues. But each set of remains was placed in a coffin and sent to Irbil, about 290 miles north, where relatives waited on a chilly, overcast afternoon, hoping that their lost loved ones were among those whose identities had been confirmed.

"For 22 years I am waiting for the return of my brother's corpse," Ali Mohammed said,

crying as he spoke of Fraydoon Mohammed. "Today I see him among many corpses, yet I cannot identify him."

Like Ameen, he had hoped for some physical reminder to set his brother's remains apart from the other piles of bones. His wailing continued.

"This is unfair," Mohammed said. "We did not recover his corpse so we can bury it and visit it every now and then. We were deprived of many things. Even the graves."

Kurdistan's president, Massoud Barzani, attended along with victims' families and representatives of the Iraqi government. The Kurdish and the Iraqi anthems were played, an effort to demonstrate unity between Baghdad's central government and the Kurdish regional govern-

ment.

But some relatives of the deceased accused Iraqi and Kurdish officials of using the corpse return for political gain. Barzani and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki are engaged in a feud over what each says is the other's attempts to horn in on his sovereignty.

Neither has helped Kurdish people, contended Shareef Salih, who was waiting for the remains of three cousins.

"They talk about prosperity, but I wish they could give me one example of that," he said of the leaders. "They did nothing for us, but they've made good political gains out of Anfal."

As he spoke, the sounds of women crying mixed with the anthems. Each coffin was draped

with a Kurdish flag, its huge and brilliant yellow sun a jarring contrast to the grim proceedings and ashen faces.

Barzani, in a brief speech, vowed to bring all Anfal victims home.

Said Salih, clutching a picture of his missing father, Salih Mahmoud, will be waiting. He had found coffins carrying remains of people from his Kurdish village, based on identification found with their skeletons.

"But, unfortunately," Salih said, "I could not find my father."

Ahmed is a special correspondent. Times staff writer Tina Susman in Baghdad contributed to this report.

TIME

December 03, 2008

Iraq's Maliki Faces Challenge Over Power Grab

By Rania Abouzeid / Baghdad



The turmoil out of Iraq may no longer be bloody and fatal, but politics can result in casualties too. Indeed, the recent successes of Iraq's Shi'ite Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, may have made him a target for the country's increasingly voluble politicians. In his apparent overwhelming confidence in his power, Maliki has recently picked fights with his Kurdish allies, his Shi'ite opponents and his Sunni partners over a variety of issues. Now Iraq's President, Jalal Talabani, who is a Kurd, wants to haul the Prime Minister into federal court, an unprecedented and blistering public slap. The cause: moves to set up councils of tribesmen loyal to Maliki in majority Shi'ite and Kurdish areas where the Prime Minister does not naturally hold sway. Talabani and the Kurds — with sympathetic sectarian nods from others — want Maliki to keep the hands of the central government off their patrimony.

It's not the first time the President and his Sunni and Shi'ite deputies in the presidential council have publicly chastised Maliki over the tribal gatherings. In late November, they demanded that Maliki suspend the pro-government groups until their legality could be determined. "For us to begin today to form councils paid for by the national budget to as-

sume a role that has no known institutional or legal place, this is a situation that needs a serious pause," the council said in a statement posted on its website. The Prime Minister's critics say the so-called Support Councils are a blatant bid to buy influence at the expense of other parties, including Maliki's coalition allies, ahead of provincial elections slated for Jan. 31. Some go further, saying they are a private militia.

The tit-for-tat political clash is being played out through dueling documents posted on each group's website. It could rip apart the governing coalition, although Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh insists that the dispute "won't reach the breaking point." (See pictures of an Iraq where the loudest noise may now be politics.)

Still, Talabani's move is a brazen attempt to clip Maliki's wings. The Prime Minister "is not budging and remains adamant that creating these councils is legal," Talabani was quoted by the Associated Press as saying in the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah on Monday. "We will go to the federal court to see whether this is indeed the case."

Maliki has blithely brushed off the criticism, saying the tribal groups are akin to the Sahwa, or Awakening, movement. That movement (of Sunni tribal sheiks in the once al-Qaeda-infested

western province of Anbar) sided with the U.S. military and the Baghdad government to drive the insurgents out. And on Wednesday, Maliki delivered his own shot across Talabani's bow, defending the legality of the councils and rejecting claims that they are beholden to him. The councils are in the service of the state and will serve future governments, he said in an open letter to Talabani written on Nov. 27 and posted on the Iraqi Cabinet's website on Wednesday. "Mr. President, we have not distributed any guns or bullets to the councils," he added. "I was surprised that they have been called militias."

The acrimonious exchanges between Maliki and the Kurds are rooted in the economic and territorial ambitions of both parties, and they threaten to widen the broadening Arab-Kurd schism. Maliki's recent call to amend the constitution to beef up the central government's powers at the expense of Iraq's 18 provinces did not spare the semiautonomous three-province Kurdish region in the north. It has not only stoked tensions with the independence-minded Kurds but has also drawn fire from his Shi'ite coalition allies in the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, who want to set up a similar semiautonomous region in the Shi'ite south. On Monday, the Kurdish regional government strongly condemned Maliki's governance, basically equating it to Saddam Hussein's. Maliki wants to "take the people of Iraq back to a period we are desperately trying to get beyond," the statement read. "A period where the excessive concentration, or centralization, of economic and political power condemned all Iraqis to unimaginable suffering."

It may an emotional argument that the Kurds are using, but it's also grounded in regional self-interest — which is the Prime Minister's case against those who oppose him. Maliki has lambasted the Kurdish regional government for unilaterally signing oil deals with international companies and cutting Baghdad out of the loop, as well as opening representative offices overseas. He has also pushed back against the Kurds' attempts to extend their military presence into territory south of their regional border. "The central government thinks the Kurdish regional government behaves like a state, and the Kurds think Maliki wants to flex his muscles and go back to a strong central government with him as the strongman," says Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurdish parliamentarian.

Kurds issue a sharp retort to Maliki

Tensions deepen over tribal councils

By Riyadh Mohammed and Alissa J. Rubin

BAGHDAD: The Kurdish regional government has released a pointed rebuttal to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's recent criticism of its policies, a sign of growing fault lines between the Kurds and Iraq's central government.

Maliki gave a speech on Nov. 20 in which he said Kurds in Iraq were pursuing several unconstitutional policies, including the development of an oil business independent of Baghdad and the opening of representative offices in foreign countries. His government has also criticized the activities of Kurdish defense forces, known as pesh merga, outside the region.

Over the past year, relations between Kurds and the government in Baghdad have worsened, with officials clashing on issues that reflect the region's growing power and autonomy.

Tensions between Kurds and Arabs are threatening again to become a serious political divide in the country. The Kurds, who predominate in Iraq's three northernmost provinces and speak Kurdish rather than Arabic, fought a long and bitter battle against Saddam Hussein, whose policy of ethnic cleansing is believed to have killed 50,000 to 100,000 Kurds.

Although the Kurds are part of Iraq's governing coalition, their increasingly public and acrimonious fight with the central government raises questions about whether the alliance will last much longer.

In addition to defending the Kurdish

positions on oil contracts and relations with other countries, the document, made public Monday criticizes Maliki's formation across the country of groups known as support councils, or political organizations made up of local tribal leaders who back the prime minister. Maliki and others have said the groups help strengthen the central government.

The Kurds say that many of those whom Maliki, an Arab, has recruited in the Kurdish region had worked with Saddam. "Enlisting such pro-regime collaborators" in the Kurdistan region could lead to the creation of armed groups that could cause destabilization, the document says.

Strong condemnation of the councils has also come from a leading Shiite party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.

On Tuesday, an official statement quoted President Jalal Talabani as saying the federal court would be asked to rule on their legality, The Associated Press reported.

The backdrop to the concerns is that Maliki, who has become a stronger leader over the past eight months, has started using his position to cement his power and increase the influence of his Dawa Party. His most recent victory was the passage last week by Parliament of an Iraqi-U.S. security agreement.

Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurd in Parliament, said the Kurds, acting in the national interest, had waited until after the security agreement had been approved to reply to the prime minister's speech.

"Maliki has accused them, so they have to reply," he said. "Hopefully it's not the beginning of a political war."

Yassin Majid, a spokesman for Maliki, said the prime minister would reply to the document.

■ 'Chemical Ali' sentenced

Ali Hassan al-Majid, a cousin of Saddam's who is known as Chemical Ali, was sentenced to death for a second time Tuesday for his part in crushing a Shiite uprising in 1991.

Mohammed Oraibi al-Khalifa, a judge for the Iraqi High Tribunal, sentenced Majid and other senior figures from Saddam's government.

Among them were Abdelghani Abdul Ghafor al-Ani, who headed Saddam's Baath Party in southern Iraq at the time of the uprising and who also received a death sentence Tuesday. The former defense minister, Sultan Hashim Ahmad al-Tai, received a 15-year prison sentence.

Majid already faces a death sentence for his role in a 1981 crackdown on Kurds in northern Iraq.

Judge Khalifa said Tuesday that Majid was guilty of crimes against humanity.

In Basra, Shiite relatives of Majid's victims welcomed the verdict. A woman who gave her name as Umm Salah and who claimed to have lost three male relatives in the crackdown, said: "When I saw the trial, it took me back 20 years, but I feel there's a difference."

"The criminals get the fair trial that our sons didn't have. Now I feel that the previous regime is something from the past and in spite of the fair trial and sentence today I still feel pain inside."



Iraq's oil-rich Basra province seeks autonomy

BASRA - 8 December 2008. - AFP

IRAQ'S independent electoral commission announced plans on Monday to collect signatures in support of a referendum to transform the oil-rich province of Basra into an autonomous region.

Signatures would be collected from December 15 to January 14 in 34 centres across the predominantly Shiite province, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) said in a statement.

According to the IHEC, there are 1,409,393 eligible voters in the province of Basra which includes the city of Basra, Iraq's second port along with Umm al-Qasr and the country's economic nerve centre.

"If after the certification of the signature collection process the signature list reaches the required 10 percent of the 'Final Voters List', a referendum will be held within three months," the statement said.

More than 70 per cent of Iraq's oil is produced in Basra and its port is used for 80 per cent of crude exports.

The region has been riven with the rivalries among three main Shiite factions - the former rebel Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), the Mahdi Army of firebrand cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and the smaller Fadhlia party.

If the referendum is organised and accepted, it will transform Basra into an autonomous region with the same rights as Kurdistan, the autonomous region in northern Iraq which also enjoys considerable oil wealth.

Over the past year, the Kurdish regional government has angered Baghdad by finalising its own energy law and signing contracts with global oil majors despite the absence of national oil legislation.



Le Premier ministre irakien refuse de dissoudre les conseils tribaux

BAGDAD, 3 décembre 2008 (Xinhua) –

LE PREMIER ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a refusé mercredi de dissoudre les conseils tribaux de soutien qui ont provoqué la tension parmi les plus hauts responsables du pays.

M. Maliki a fait savoir cette décision dans une lettre adressée au président irakien Jalal Talibani, expliquant qu'« il n'y a pas de justification pratique ni légale à la dissolution des conseils de soutien alors qu'ils ont réussi à établir la sécurité et la stabilité et qu'ils ont pris part aux efforts de réconciliation nationale en Irak ».

« Le soutien des conseils n'est rien d'autre qu'un regroupement tribal ouvert à tous les membres tribaux qui veulent soutenir les forces de sécurité », a rétorqué M. Maliki dans une lettre disponible sur le site internet de ses services.

« Nous n'avons distribué aucun fusil, ni pistolet, ni même une balle aux

conseils de soutien, par conséquent, il nous a paru étrange que vous (Talabani) les décriviez comme des milices », a-t-il critiqué.

M. Maliki a également affirmé que les forces de sécurité n'auraient pas pu réussir à imposer les règlements légitimes sans l'appui des conseils.

Les dirigeants kurdes s'opposent à la formation des conseils tribaux dans les régions arabo-kurdes hors de la région autonome, accusant Bagdad de chercher à contrôler les régions en conflit qu'ils espèrent annexer à leur région kurde.

À la fin du mois de novembre, le conseil présidentiel, qui comprend le président Talabani, un vice-président chiite Abdel Abdul Mahdi et un vice-président sunnite Tariq al-Hashimi, avait demandé à M. Maliki de dissoudre les conseils de soutien, estimant qu'ils sont « inconstitutionnels ».



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IRAQ. Le référendum en juillet prochain, décidé par le Parlement sur l'accord de sécurité avec les Etats-Unis, place la prochaine Administration américaine devant une inconnue politique de taille.

UN RETRAIT A RISQUE

Salué par la plupart des protagonistes irakiens et par l'Administration du président George W. Bush, l'accord de sécurité prévoyant le retrait américain d'ici fin 2011 marque un pas important vers la fin de l'occupation américaine de l'Iraq, après plus de cinq années de guerre et près d'un an de négociations sur les conditions du maintien des soldats américains.

Mais le Parlement irakien a réservé des surprises aux Etats-Unis en réclamant, après avoir approuvé l'accord, un référendum populaire pour l'avaliser. Cette consultation aurait lieu le 30 juillet et demanderait aux Irakiens ce qu'ils pensent de l'accord six mois après son entrée en vigueur, selon le conseiller irakien à la Sécurité nationale, Mouaffak Al-Roubaie. L'accord négocié entre l'Administration Bush et le gouvernement irakien pourrait ainsi être remis en cause, quelques mois après que le nouveau président américain, Barack Obama, aura repris l'affaire irakienne des mains de George W. Bush.

En l'état actuel, l'accord stipule que tous les soldats américains auront quitté l'Iraq d'ici fin 2011, quelle que soit la situation sur le terrain. Il impose une date limite de retrait que M. Bush a refusée pendant des mois. Mais au moins, M. Bush pouvait-il faire valoir que M. Obama avait environ trois ans pour se retourner et mettre fin à une guerre, que deux Américains sur trois continuent à désapprouver selon les sondages. M. Obama a promis, pendant sa campagne électorale, de faire rentrer le gros des soldats en 16 mois,



d'ici à l'été 2010. C'est a priori ce qu'il pourrait avoir à faire effectivement si les Irakiens disaient non en juillet 2009. Car les termes de l'accord stipulent que celui-ci peut être dénoncé à tout moment, avec un an de préavis, ce qui renverrait précisément à l'été 2010.

La secrétaire d'Etat, Condoleezza Rice, et la Maison Blanche ont minimisé la portée du référendum. « En aucun cas cela ne pourra retarder la mise en œuvre » de l'accord au 1er janvier, a dit Mme Rice. Mais ce référendum créerait une incertitude politique potentiellement dangereuse, surtout dans une période proche des prochaines élections provinciales en Iraq, prévues fin janvier. « Les conséquences possibles d'un tel référendum ne sont pas claires, mais pourraient bien compliquer un retrait en douceur », a noté le centre de réflexion américain du National Security

Network. Ce centre redoute que les Iraniens ou les Sadristes n'en profitent pour troubler le jeu. M. Obama devra « avoir des plans de secours s'ils (les Irakiens) rejettent » l'accord, a dit Michael E. O'Hanlon, expert à l'Institution Brookings, qui se garde bien de prédire l'issue du référendum. Toujours est-il que M. Bush, après avoir ordonné il y a plus de cinq ans l'invasion de l'Iraq, peut désormais se targuer de quitter la Maison Blanche fort d'une date fixant à trois ans la fin de la guerre, bien que le président sortant se soit longtemps opposé à l'établissement d'un calendrier précis. Mais il reviendra au président élu Barack Obama, opposé au déclenchement de la guerre en Iraq, de superviser ce retrait et d'en fixer les modalités. Le texte de l'accord prévoit notamment que « toutes les forces américaines »,

actuellement au nombre de 146 000 et réparties sur plus de 30 bases à travers le pays, « devront avoir quitté le territoire irakien le 31 décembre 2011 au plus tard ». Fin juin 2009 au plus tard, toutes les forces de combat américaines devront s'être retirées des villes, villages et localités d'Iraq.

Or, M. Obama a promis pendant de faire rentrer le gros des soldats d'ici à l'été 2010, soit plus rapidement que prévu par l'accord entre Washington et Bagdad. Il devra donc décider de s'en tenir au calendrier négocié, ou d'accélérer le mouvement, alors qu'il a promis d'envoyer des renforts massifs en Afghanistan dès que possible, pour y enrayer une

insurrection en montée de puissance. De l'avis de nombre de militaires et d'experts américains, la dernière option constitue toutefois un choix périlleux en matière de sécurité, qui pourrait se dégrader en cas de retrait précipité, et complexe en termes logistiques, alors que des dizaines de milliers de pièces d'équipement doivent être rapatriées. Le chef d'état-major américain, l'amiral Michael Mullen, a récemment prévenu qu'un retrait en trois ans était « faisable », tout en montrant des réserves quant à un calendrier de 16 mois. « Nous avons quelque 150 000 hommes en Iraq. Nous avons de nombreuses bases. Nous avons énormément d'équipement sur place. Et clairement, nous voudrions (effectuer le retrait) en toute sécurité », a-t-il déclaré.

Mais le futur occupant de la Maison Blanche pourrait bien être obligé de

respecter sa promesse de campagne.

Maliki renforce sa position

Si le référendum de juillet place la prochaine Administration américaine devant une inconnue de taille, l'accord de sécurité lui-même renforce l'autorité du premier ministre iraquien, Nouri Al-Maliki, qui a franchi une étape dans sa quête de stature d'homme d'Etat en obtenant la ratification par le Parlement de l'accord controversé avec les Etats-Unis. « Son objectif est d'apparaître comme un homme d'Etat intransigeant y compris avec ses alliés puissants, comme les Kurdes, ou avec ses protecteurs, les Américains », affirme Hosham Dawood, spécialiste de l'Iraq au Centre national de la recherche scientifique français. C'est donc sur ce registre qu'a joué ces derniers mois cet homme de 59 ans, choisi comme premier ministre par défaut en mai 2006. « Pour survivre, Maliki devait éviter d'être dépeint comme une marionnette des Américains et avec cet accord de retrait (des soldats améri-

cains) il peut apparaître comme un héros de l'indépendance nationale », estime Juan Cole, professeur d'histoire de l'Université de Michigan aux Etats-Unis.

Le premier ministre a rejeté la première puis la deuxième copie du projet, clamé qu'on ne lui forcerait pas la main, présenté 110 modifications et en a changé au passage l'intitulé en « Accord sur le retrait des troupes étrangères ». Pour Hamid Hassan, politologue à l'Université de Bagdad, « cet accord avec les Etats-Unis renforce considérablement la position de M. Maliki qui va désormais se concentrer sur les élections provinciales » du 31 janvier. Le premier ministre devrait utiliser ses succès et en particulier cet accord face à ses rivaux chiïtes : le courant du chef radical Moqtada Sadr et le Conseil Suprême Islamique en Iraq (CSII) d'Abdel-Aziz Al-Hakim. Le premier ministre dirigerait une liste intitulée « l'alliance pour l'Etat de droit », qui sera présente dans toutes les

provinces.

Pourtant, il y 15 mois, tout le monde le croyait fini. Membre du parti chiïte Dawa, revenu en Iraq en 2003 après un exil en Iran et surtout en Syrie, M. Maliki est devenu premier ministre à l'apogée des dissensions confessionnelles, et au moment où les milices chiïtes et sunnites tenaient le haut du pavé face à des forces armées iraqiennes anémiques. « A l'été 2007, il avait perdu la confiance de tous. Réussir aujourd'hui à faire adopter une loi aussi controversée par le Parlement est un vrai triomphe et montre qu'il a pris de l'étoffe », assure M. Cole.

Car dans ce tableau rouge sang, il a bénéficié d'un concours de circonstances favorables : la réussite du plan de sécurité de Bagdad lancé en février 2007 et le rejet d'Al-Qaëda par les tribus sunnites qui ont créé des milices anti-djihadistes. Son coup de génie a été la bataille de Bassorah, en mars 2008, contre une milice de sa confession : il a croisé le fer avec l'Armée du

Mahdi de Moqtada Al-Sadr jusque dans son bastion de Sadr City. Ce fait d'armes lui a permis d'élargir sa popularité hors de sa communauté, et son nom a même été acclamé par les tribus sunnites de Tikrit, région natale de Saddam Hussein. Populaire, M. Maliki l'est sûrement, mais pour réussir il doit élargir sa base politique. A la tête d'un petit parti (Dawa), il essaie de créer une dynamique autour de sa personne. Pour cela, il cherche à obtenir le soutien des tribus, des technocrates, des classes moyennes, des habitants de grandes villes, voire des Arabes sunnites dans les zones disputées avec les Kurdes. Avec les tribus, il glorifie leur rôle de défense du pays, avec les technocrates, il insiste sur le renforcement de l'Etat central et, vis-à-vis des Arabes, sunnites comme chiïtes, il assure qu'il ne laissera pas les Kurdes obtenir plus que ce à quoi ils ont droit.

Hicham Mourad



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Edito

LES TRIBUS APPELEES EN RENFORT

Après les avoir ignorées, l'armée américaine a compris l'importance des tribus en Iraq et dans plusieurs régions avec lesquelles elle a passé des accords qui expliquent ses succès au cours des derniers mois. La carte tribale, avec des alliances anti-insurrection conclues avec de puissants chefs locaux, est désormais un atout majeur dans le jeu américain en Iraq et pourrait être exportée ailleurs, comme en Afghanistan.

Cela a commencé dans la province d'Al-Anbar, une région désertique à l'ouest de Bagdad, où un cheikh, Abdel-Sattar Abou-Richa, lève à la fin de 2006 ses guerriers contre les djihadistes islamistes, qu'il défait après huit mois de combats. En janvier 2007, l'armée américaine nomme le capitaine Elliot Press, de la 3e division d'Infanterie, « Tribal Engagement Officer ». Sa mission était d'étudier les tribus, d'alimenter les rapports de renseignements et de conseiller le commandement sur les affaires tribales. Au quartier général de Bagdad, une équipe de spécialistes étudie sur cartographie la complexe géographie tribale du pays. Désormais, dans les unités, les officiers américains sont encouragés à développer et entretenir des liens avec les chefs tribaux, même s'il ne s'agit pas d'une politique systématique et que cela varie d'une base et d'un commandant à l'autre.

C'est ainsi que l'armée américaine en Iraq a passé des accords informels de cessez-le-feu avec des groupes d'insurgés sunnites, libéré des détenus après avoir obtenu des garanties de bonne conduite des cheikhs et embauché

les milices tribales comme agents de sécurité. Désormais, dans de nombreuses régions — la plupart sunnites mais aussi quelques chiïtes —, les guerriers tribaux forment le noyau des Sahwa, ces milices qui ont mis les djihadistes en déroute. Dans le même temps, l'armée iraquienne, appuyée par les soldats américains, a frappé durement l'Armée du Mahdi, la puissante milice du leader radical chiïte Moqtada Sadr, notamment dans ses fiefs de Bassora (sud) et Sadr City à Bagdad.

Cette nouvelle approche tribale, combinée aux attaques contre les Sadristes, s'est traduite par une baisse considérable de la violence et une accélération du transfert des provinces aux forces iraqiennes, après des années sanglantes où l'insurrection tenait le haut du pavé. Elles sont aujourd'hui 13 provinces, sur un total de 18, à être aux mains des autorités iraqiennes. Dans ces régions, les forces américaines sont désormais cantonnées dans leurs bases et n'interviendront dans des opérations de sécurité qu'à la demande du gouverneur de la province. Deux autres provinces devraient prochainement retourner dans le giron du pouvoir iraquien. Il s'agit du gouvernorat de Kirkouk, une région pétrolière âprement disputée par les Kurdes, les Arabes et les Turcomans, et de celui de Salaheddine qui fut longtemps un bastion de l'insurrection sunnite. Il ne restera alors que trois provinces sous contrôle américain : Bagdad, et les deux régions où les violences sont les plus fortes actuellement : Ninive avec sa capitale Mossoul, et Diyala et son chef-lieu Baaqouba.

Kurdistan Regional Government
KRG.org - 01 December. 2008



FULL TEXT OF KRG RESPONSE TO IRAQI PRIME MINISTER'S ACCUSATIONS

Kurdistan Regional Government responds to Iraq Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's accusations of 20 November 2008

The development of good governance that effectively serves all the people all the time, in all corners of Iraq, is a long and extremely difficult work in progress. This work began with the overthrow of the former regime in 2003. It went through three interim governments culminating in the overwhelming approval of the Constitution in 2005 and the formation of a permanent government in 2006. From this initial formation of structure and system, the process has been progressing toward establishing partnerships and procedures, albeit sometimes with severe difficulty.

With due understanding and full respect for the traumatic history we have been passing through, which must neither be forgotten nor repeated, and the excessive burden of our troubled legacies, it is not surprising that the process of developing good governance is indeed so difficult.

It is thus unfortunate and deeply regrettable that the press conference of Iraq's Prime Minister illustrates efforts being made to take the people of Iraq back to a period we are desperately trying to get beyond. It was a period where the excessive concentration, or centralization, of economic and political power condemned all Iraqi peoples to unimaginable suffering.

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's press conference focused on a letter from the Iraqi Presidency Council questioning the formation of "Support Councils." In reaction to this letter, the Prime Minister singled out the Kurdistan Region and described certain of its policies and actions to be unconstitutional.

Given the seriousness of these allegations, it is important that all Iraqis are better informed and become educated regarding the issues and facts.

"Support Councils"

These are tribal councils directly affiliated with the Office of the Prime Minister of the federal government. The Office has been contacting people in the Kurdistan Region, and in the so-called disputed areas. The people being contacted include former collaborators who were closely linked to the security and intelligence agencies of the defunct regime of Saddam Hussein.

The purpose is to enlist these people into forming groups that support the Prime Minister in the disputed areas. The groups are to be armed and they are to become part of the government structure, organized, equipped, and paid for by the federal government.

The former collaborators, who include tribal leaders of the Kurdistan Region, in the past, conspired against fellow citizens. They took active part in military operations that detained, tortured, and killed fellow citizens, including civilian women and children, for political reasons. They aided and abetted the forcing of thousands of families to migrate from their homes, and in destroying their communities.

Following the 1991 war and uprising, however, the Kurdistan Front, a consortium of opposition political groups, issued a general amnesty to all collaborators on the condition that they never again participate in such treachery and violations of human rights.

The Office of the Prime Minister has also contacted collaborators who actively participated in the Anfal, a campaign that the international community has determined to be genocide. These persons, who have been on the run since 1991, were not included in the general amnesty.

The amnesty successfully called for surrendering of arms and serving the part of Iraq that was liberated during the period 1991 to 2003. It began a new chapter, a process of reconciliation that led to a still deepening sense of forgiveness and tolerance. This was, indeed, an important strategy to engender and promote levels of personal security and political stability that the people of the Kurdistan Region enjoy today.

A result of this policy is that the Kurdistan Region became a safe haven for many former non-Kurdish Iraqi opposition leaders and their families. The Region became the stage for opposition groups to orga-



nize their activities against the former regime. Most of these groups are now part of the political process within the government of a new Iraq.

Enlisting such pro-regime collaborators into "Support Councils" in the Kurdistan Region and in the "disputed areas" could very well have the following effects:

1. Instability and discord within the Kurdistan Region on the order of what occurred during the rule of the former regime.
2. The creation of divisions in national reconciliation within the Kurdistan Region.
3. The creation of security lapses that allow infiltration of terrorists into the Region.
4. The creation of armed groups in the "disputed areas" that cause destabilization, divisions, and strife.

Establishing these "Support Councils" was not a consensus decision of the Iraqi Council of Ministers. Whether the councils are constitutional is a matter to be determined by the Iraqi Council of Representatives, the Iraqi Presidency Council, or the Federal Supreme Court.

The duty of the government is to create an environment conducive to reconciliation, not to reverse the progress already made. The government has the responsibility to provide security, not to create insecurity. The mission of the government is to create tolerance, not to plant the seeds of division.

These "Support Councils" cannot, and will not, contribute to national reconciliation. Nor can they contribute to peace and stability. These councils would have only a destabilizing effect because they are a re-creation of Saddam-era collaborator groups who brought death and destruction to the Kurdistan Region.

It would appear that the intention of these councils is to undermine the Kurdistan Region and to thwart reconstruction and development in an important part of Iraq. This counters the federal government's responsibility to ensure security and to promote the political process. It counters efforts of the Kurdistan Region to promote national reconciliation and to shield it against forces that aim to destroy it.

Let us be clear. The days of generating divisions and sowing discord by government among the people of Kurdistan are over. Such attempts stem only from forces opposed to democratizing the political process. These efforts work against the unity and coalition federal government.

It is not surprising that such attempts have met with public denunciations before official responses have been made. These efforts pose a real danger and could lead to sedition, under the pretext of national reconciliation.

Constitutional Issues

Though the Prime Minister has taken the oath to promote and protect the Constitution of Iraq - as it currently exists - it is, indeed, disconcerting when he cites the Constitution in attacking others while apparently violating it when taking unilateral decisions. The Prime Minister is obligated to act within the limits of the current constitution and not in accordance with a future constitution he may prefer.

The new order in Iraq is based on the Constitution that was approved in a countrywide referendum. In his press conference, the Prime Minister regrettably offered opinion that the leadership and people of the Kurdistan Region are demanding more than what the Constitution allows.

In response, let us re-examine the Constitution, specifically the distribution of powers. According to Article-110, the exclusive powers of the federal government include formulating foreign policy; national security; formulating fiscal policy; regulating standards, weights, and measures; regulating immigration, residency, and citizenship; regulating the policies of broadcast frequencies and mail; drawing up the general and investment budget bill; and planning policies relating to water sources.

As for the powers of the regions, Article-121 states, "The regional powers shall have the right to exercise executive, legislative, and judicial powers in accordance with this Constitution, except for those authorities stipulated to be the exclusive authorities of the federal government."

The Constitution, thus, clearly specifies the distribution of powers. The Kurdistan Region seeks no more power than the Constitution allows. It only seeks that the Constitution be implemented.

Oil and Gas Contracts

The Prime Minister has described the oil contracts signed by the Kurdistan Regional Government to be in violation of the Constitution.

On existing oil and gas fields, Article-112 of the Constitution affirms:

"First: The federal government, with the producing governorates and regional governments, shall undertake the management of oil and gas extracted from present fields provided that it distributes its revenues in a fair manner in proportion to the population distribution in all parts of the country, specifying an allotment for a specified period for the damaged regions which were unjustly deprived of them by the former regime, and the regions that were damaged afterwards in a way that ensures balanced development in different areas of the country, and this shall be regulated by law.

"Second: The federal government, with the producing regional and governorate governments, shall together formulate the necessary strategic policies to develop the oil and gas wealth in a way that achieves the highest benefit to the Iraqi people using the most advanced techniques of market principles, and encouraging investment."

As for future oilfields and future exploration, Article-115 is very clear that "all powers not stipulated in the exclusive powers of the federal government belong to the authorities of the regions and governorates that are not organized in a region. With regard to other powers shared between the federal government and the regional government, priority shall be given to the law of the regions and governorates not organized in a region in case of dispute."

Article-141 of the Constitution also states that legislation enacted in the Kurdistan Region since 1992 shall remain in force, and decisions issued by the Kurdistan Regional Government, including court decisions and contracts, shall be considered valid unless they are amended or annulled pursuant to the laws of the Kurdistan Region by the competent entity in the Region, provided that they do not contradict the Constitution.

The issue centers on the status of oil contracts. Some of the oil contracts were signed even before the Constitution was written. Article-141 clearly establishes the legality of these contracts. As for the newly-signed contracts, which concern new oilfields, they all fall under the terms of Article-115 and Article-111 of the Constitution.

This calls for some explanation. On 15 February 2007, there was agreement on a draft hydrocarbon law. There was also a letter to the Iraqi Council of Ministers, dated 26 February 2007, signed by both the Iraqi President and Kurdistan Region President that was approved as an annex to the draft law. This letter urged the approval of the draft oil and gas law by the Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR, the national parliament), and the establishment of appropriate structures and

mechanisms specified in the draft law.

The letter also said that if the draft law is not passed by the COR by the end of May 2007, then both sides would have the right to sign oil development and production contracts as per the Constitution. Thus, agreement on the draft law and the annex letter was clear. The annex letter also contains several conditions and commitments that have still not been met by the federal government. The question is why.

If we look at the Kurdistan Region's oil contracts from an economic and oil-industry point of view, it is clear that:

1. These are oilfield development and oil exploration contracts that would promote capacity-building in the oil industry in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
2. Increasing oil production in the Kurdistan Region increases production for all Iraq.
3. Oil sale revenues, whether from the Kurdistan Region or from Basra in southern Iraq, accrue as national income for all Iraq.
4. The oil industry's infrastructure has not made any progress in other parts of Iraq as a result of the disastrous policies of the federal government, despite having spent around 8 billion dollars on this industry. In fact there has been a reduction in oil production and oil export. If this is the state of oil policy in Baghdad, should we be part of the failure or should we continue with our own oil policy in the Kurdistan Region to develop local capacity and attract expertise in the industry, so that we can contribute to a sound oil policy for the whole Iraq? What we have done is first and foremost in the interest of the whole country and then that of the Kurdistan Region.

Thus, increasing oil production and capacity-building in the Kurdistan Region is good for the country. Our actions have been constitutional and our contracts are good for all the people of Iraq.

Further, Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani has repeatedly said that if there have been any actions by the Kurdistan Region, including the signing of oil contracts, that are in any way in violation of the Constitution, we are prepared to review our position, acknowledge our errors, and abandon our actions. We believe the Constitution has the last word; all our actions derive their legitimacy from the Constitution.

It is also worth pointing out that in his policy announcement in June 2006, the Prime Minister confirmed his commitment to draft a new hydrocarbon law when he said "we will draft new legislation to regulate the hydrocarbon sector (oil and gas) which will also include the rights of regions and governorates as per the Constitution."

US Military Bases in the Kurdistan Region

We would like to clarify the matter of inviting the US Military to establish bases in the Kurdistan Region, which the Prime Minister described as unconstitutional. This issue was raised when the Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani was asked a question recently in Washington DC. The question centered on "if" the Region would be prepared to host US Military bases. The President responded in the affirmative.

There is nothing new here. On behalf of the people of the Kurdistan Region, President Barzani, before most other Iraqi leaders, has repeatedly called for the signing of the status-of-forces agreement between Iraq and the United States. He has supported this policy for the good of all Iraq.

It is well known that there are currently no US military bases in the Kurdistan Region. "If" an agreement is signed, and "if" there is a request to have a US Military base in the Kurdistan Region, then there would be no objection.

Travel to the Kurdistan Region

The Federal Prime Minister pointed to restrictions on Iraqis traveling to the Kurdistan Region from other parts of Iraq, including the requirement that travelers must obtain an affidavit or proclamation from a local resident before they can travel to the Region. This may sound as if Iraqi citizens are prevented from travelling to the Kurdistan Region.

First, it is important to consider figures on Iraqi citizens who have become residents of the Kurdistan Region after fleeing threats of violence in other parts of the country. Our figures indicate that 10,559 Arab, Kurd, Turkmen, and Christian families have fled to, and now reside in, Erbil province. In Duhok province, the figure is 17,980 families. And in Sulaimniya province, it is 6,312 families.

In addition, some 1,900 university lecturers from outside the Kurdistan Region have joined universities in the Region. At least 3,740 students from Baghdad and Mosul and other places study in the Region's universities. About 14,543 people from other parts of Iraq work as laborers in Erbil province while in Duhok the figure is 9,500.

As for restrictions on travel to the Region, it should be pointed out that there are more checkpoints in Baghdad than the total of all other checkpoints in the country. The Kurdistan Region has also been a target for terrorists. Some of our most prominent political leaders and many others have been victims.

As elsewhere in Iraq, checkpoints screen all travelers entering the Kurdistan Region regardless of their ethnic and religious background, whether they are Kurd, Arab, Turkmen, others, or foreigners. The procedures are not unlike those followed elsewhere in the country.

All peace loving people are welcome. This past summer, hotels in Duhok, Shaqlawa, Suleimaniyah, and other places in the Kurdistan Region, were full of guests from Baghdad, Mosul, and other parts of the country.

The Kurdistan Region accepts full responsibility for the security of all visitors and citizens alike regardless of their origin or background. The laws of the Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi Constitution allow us, and, in fact, they obligate us, to provide security in the Region. The measures we take are purely for security reasons to protect lives.

It should not be forgotten that in the past the Kurdistan Region was a sanctuary for people fleeing the oppression of the former regime. The mountains of our Region embraced them, including many of Iraq's current leaders and their families. Many Christian families, Sabean, and others who have fled the threat of violence have relocated to our Region. The doors of the Kurdistan Region shall remain open to all, except to terrorists.

Confrontation between Kurdistan Region forces and federal forces

The Prime Minister has referred to Kurdistan Region security forces as rebels even though they have consistently served the political process in the country. Indeed, in the early days, they were the only regular Iraqi force following the collapse of the former regime. Since then, they have played a key role in defeating terrorists and outlaws.

Kurdish military units are part of the Iraqi Army. If the Prime Minister was referring to the Kurdistan Regional Guards, the Peshmerga, these forces are authorized per Constitution Article-121 which states, "The regional government shall be responsible for all administrative requirements of the region, particularly the establishment and organization of the internal security forces for the region such as police, security forces, and guards of the region."

The unfortunate and regrettable confrontation in Khanaqin was due to the unfortunate manner in which decisions were taken and regrettable miscommunication of orders. In effect, however, this incident emanated from excessive delay in implementing Constitution Article-140 for which the federal government is responsible.

Constitution Article-117 clearly recognizes the Kurdistan Region as a federal region but does not define its final boundaries. Constitution Article-143 accepts that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is the official government of certain specified territory. And, Article-140 calls for the disposition of other territories to be determined in accordance with a specified democratic process.

The boundary per Article-143 was unilaterally, and undemocratically, determined in October 1991. This boundary was militarized and within one month, in November 1991, more than 20,000 families were forced to migrate from areas south of the line - mostly from Kirkuk areas - to the territory north of the line.

Constitution Article-140 lays down a clear road map to define the final boundaries of the territory to be governed by the KRG. The excessive delay in implementing this article is the primary cause of tension and administrative problems in the so-called disputed areas. These are areas that suffered severely from ethnic cleansing and community destruction under the former regime.

Failure to implement Article-140 is also in violation of the policy of the Iraqi government which the Prime Minister announced in June 2006. The Prime Minister stated that "the government will be committed to implement Article-140 of the Constitution which is based on Article-58 of the 'Law of Administration for the State of Iraq'. The Article specifies three phases for the implementation of this Article which include normalization, census, and a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed areas. The government will start by taking the appropriate steps for the normalization phase, including by rejoining of the detached districts and sub-districts back to Kirkuk governorate, and complete this phase no later than 29 March 2007. The census phase

will be completed by 31 July 2007 and the referendum phase by 15 November 2007. The question is why the Prime Minister has not met his commitments.

Attempts to send in the Iraqi Army and the creation of so-called "Support Councils" in these disputed areas are clearly intended to impede and abort the implementation of Article-140. The incident at Khanaqin was never about the deployment of the Iraqi army for security purposes. The area was already secure. It was, indeed, an attempt to change the facts on the ground, an attempt to bypass the Constitution.

The Iraqi Army did not face confrontation. What was confronted were orders and instructions taken unilaterally with flagrant political motives. The army was ordered to enter a peaceful and secure town that falls within the disputed areas of Article-140. There was no specific military objective. This kind of behavior poses a danger to the Iraqi Army and to the country.

The use of the national army to settle internal disagreements and political disputes is a violation of the Constitution. Constitution Article-9 states, "The Iraqi armed forces and security services will be composed of the components of the Iraqi people with due consideration given to their balance and representation without discrimination or exclusion. They shall be subject to the control of the civilian authority, shall defend Iraq, shall not be used as an instrument to oppress the Iraqi people, shall not interfere in political affairs, and shall have no role in the transfer of authority."

Kurdistan Region representation offices abroad

In his remarks, the Prime Minister also talks about the opening of diplomatic offices abroad by the Kurdistan Region and describes them as a violation of the constitution. Once again, let the Constitution be the guide. Article-121 says, "Offices for the regions and governorates shall be established in embassies and diplomatic missions in order to follow cultural, social, and developmental affairs."

Thus, the Constitution allows the establishing of diplomatic offices abroad. The expression "Offices for the regions and governorates shall be established" in this article implies that the initiative would be either from the Region or the federal government. Most probably this implies that the offices shall be established jointly by the two parties.

We cannot claim that the federal government has not taken any steps to initiate this process, and we are also not claiming that we do not share any of the blame for this. But foreign policy is the exclusive responsibility of the federal government and the federal government should have taken the initiative.

This issue requires examination of past practices and current requirements.

Part of the Kurdistan Region was liberated territory since 1991 and operated autonomously in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 688 until the overthrow of the former regime in 2003. The Iraqi government unilaterally withdrew all administrative structures from the Region in October 1991. Legal and administrative institutions such as the regional parliament and the regional government were established following internationally-observed free and fair regional elections in May 1992.

The former Iraqi opposition parties, including the Prime Minister's own party, dealt with the Kurdistan Region as a liberated part of Iraq. In late 1992, the Region hosted the largest gathering of Iraqi opposition parties. It was at this conference that the principle of federalism was formally proposed and adopted for Iraq.

During that time, there obviously was no diplomatic representation for the Kurdistan Region or other Iraqi opposition parties in Iraq's embassies abroad. The opposition parties, including those of the Region, opened offices in a number of countries and the representatives of the Kurdistan Region abroad were among the most active.

Because of the large number of Iraqi Kurdish communities abroad, the Kurdistan Region's representatives played an important role in helping to shape public opinion against the regime of Saddam Hussein. They were always available to help all Iraqi opposition parties, including the party of the Prime Minister.

The realities of Iraq, the existence of large Kurdish communities outside the country, and the need to shape public opinion abroad, all were factors that obliged us to have representation abroad. And now, we are ready to discuss and find a new arrangement for these offices, as soon as possible. We are also ready to take the initiative and propose our views, especially after the recent adoption of the foreign service law by the Iraqi parliament.

Abiding by the Constitution

The Kurdistan Region Presidency and the Kurdistan Regional Government are fully ready to enter negotiations to resolve all outstanding issues based on the Constitution. All sides, including the party of the Prime Minister, feel that the whole process is not moving in the right direction and that something needs to be done.

By acknowledging this situation, five committees have been established to determine a way forward on the contentious issues of consensus government; concept of partnership and the decisionmaking process; matters pertaining to security and the army; the problem of disputed areas; foreign policy; and the problems concerning the hydrocarbon law and budget. These five committees are composed of representatives from each of two Kurdistan parties, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, the Iraqi Islamic Party, and the Islamic Dawa Party. We will abide by the recommendations of these committees.

A great deal is at stake. The Prime Minister calls on everyone to abide by the Constitution. In 2006, he described the Constitution as "among the best constitutions in the world because it is based on freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law." In a speech on 8 November 2008, however, he said, "The Constitution was written in a hasty way and under extraordinary conditions. It limits the powers of the central government and it is feared that federalism will handicap the country."

In other words, the Prime Minister considers the Constitution of Iraq to be the problem, a constitution which he took the oath to protect and implement. In fact, failure to abide by the Constitution is the problem.

The Prime Minister believes that centralization is the key to the problems of Iraq. Iraq's history, however, has proven that centralization is dangerous. It has resulted in the country being controlled by a select group, and eventually by a single party and single individual.

The party of the Prime Minister was a victim of centralization. The people of southern Iraq were marginalized. The people of Kurdistan Region were considered second-class citizens. And the elite members of the Dulaimi tribe and western Iraq were brutally oppressed like others.

Not abiding by the Constitution portends the ominous:

1. The Prime Minister aims to suspend the Constitution. Despite his talk about the need to make amendments to the Constitution, what he really wants is to suspend the Constitution; a constitution which he participated in drafting and for which he has expressed admiration. The idea of suspending the constitution is a very dangerous action indeed. Amendments can be made to the Constitution and there is a mechanism set out in the Constitution for this purpose. Suspension of the Constitution is unacceptable to all parties, even those who opposed the constitution.

2. Imposing decisions of one party at the exclusion of participation in the decision-making process by other parties who are part of a coalition government. The Prime Minister applies the decisions taken by the Islamic Dawa Party (the Prime Minister's faction) to the government. This is in violation of the Constitution and in violation of all the

agreements we have. Most importantly, it is a violation of the program of the coalition government of federal Iraq.

3. Militarization of society by using the Iraqi Army for political purposes and establishing political groups armed and funded by the government. The Federal Prime Minister attempts to militarize the society and create Support Councils. In fact, these are all linked to and belong to his party. Of course, his party has the right to establish such organizations in accordance with regulations set out in the law. But they cannot be established in the name of the government and be funded and armed by the government.

4. The federal government does not rely on a law to govern the work of the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers doesn't even have an agreed upon charter, so proposals and decisions are all drafted in the Office of the Prime Minister (by leaders of the Islamic Dawa Party) first and then presented to the Council of Ministers.

5. The Federal Prime Minister keeps maintaining that he is the only one in charge of the executive branch. But this is not the case when we look at Article-66 of the Constitution which says, "The federal executive power shall consist of the President of the Republic and the Council of Ministers and shall exercise its powers in accordance with the Constitution and the law."

The Constitution has entrusted executive powers to the Council of Ministers. Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki is the head of the Council of Ministers. Important decisions must be made by the Council of Ministers headed by him. They cannot be taken by himself on behalf of the Council of Ministers. In the new Iraq, decisionmaking is not to be monopolized.

The Constitution requires the government to draft laws - to prepare bills and present them to the parliament for approval. Instead of doing this, the federal government continues to rely on old laws that gave the Revolutionary Command Council (established after the military coup in 1968 and acted as the ultimate decisionmaking body in Iraq before 2003) extraordinary legislative and executive powers, which is against the Constitution.

Relying on such laws that gave powers to the Revolutionary Command Council and the President is a return to an oppressive past that bypasses the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives (the national parliament).

The Kurdistan Regional Government is committed to the Constitution of Iraq. We are also committed to, and believe in, the principle of consensus. We respect all agreements that are in the interests of all the people of Iraq. We want democracy for all Iraq.

Iraq will remain strong when all its components are united. Iraq will progress through the strengthening of its federal foundations. It will remain a democratic country through distribution of political powers and revenues. We will continue on our march forward in providing security and peace for our people.

All this requires faith in the principle of consensus, partnership in government, and joint decisionmaking.

We reiterate that our guide to the future is the Constitution of Iraq on which we shall always rely. While the time for political niceties may well be over, we cannot - indeed, we shall not - accept anything that is contrary to the Constitution.



Iraq says SK Energy considers scrapping Kurdish deal

BAGHDAD, December 4 2008 (Reuters) -

IRAQ'S Oil Ministry on Thursday said South Korean refiner SK Energy had expressed willingness to cancel a deal with the Kurdish Regional Government in hopes of resuming imports of Iraqi oil.

If the company, South Korea's largest refiner, announces a cancellation of its dealings with the largely autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq's north, the government will resume oil sales to SK, Oil Ministry spokesman Asim Jihad told Reuters.

SK Energy is a member of a consortium developing the Bazian oilfield in Kurdistan, which is locked in a major struggle with the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in Baghdad for control of the country's massive oil resources.

The company angered Baghdad in Nov. 2007 when it agreed to a production-

sharing contract with the Kurdish government for Bazian. In response, Baghdad suspended its term deal with the refiner of 90,000 barrels of crude per day.

"The Iraqi Oil Ministry and the SK energy company reached an initial agreement to lift the company from Iraq's black list," Jihad said. "The company expressed its willingness to cancel the deal signed with the (Kurdish government), signed without the approval of the Iraqi government and the Oil Ministry."

Jihad also said that companies which cancelled dealings with the Kurdish government would be eligible to participate in bidding for major oil and gas contracts.

(Reporting by Ahmed Rasheed; writing by Mohammed Abbas; editing by James Jukwey)

The Washington Times December 4 2008

Iraq's prime minister, president in public quarrel

BY HAMZA HENDAWI - AP

BAGHDAD -- Iraq's presidential council has taken the unusual step of publicly criticizing the Shiite prime minister after he berated them for their opposition to councils of loyal tribesmen in several Iraqi provinces.

The quarrel is the latest in a series of political setbacks that underline enduring rivalries between Iraq's political factions as the country struggles to find its footing after years of brutal violence.

The dispute between Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, President Jalal Talabani and Talabani's two deputies comes with Iraqis already polarized by a proposed security agreement with the United States that would allow American troops to stay in Iraq for three more years.

Groups opposed to the pact say it enshrines what they see as Iraq's occupation. Proponents, like al-Maliki, say it is the only viable way for Iraq to regain its full sovereignty by 2012.

At the center of the new dispute between al-Maliki and Talabani are the "support councils" made up of pro-government tribesmen that began to spring up earlier this year when the prime minister took charge of military operations against Shiite militias in southern Iraq.

The councils were seen by many as an attempt by the prime minister ahead of Jan. 31 provincial elections to create a support base in areas where his Shiite rivals dominate or, in Sunni areas, to counter the weight of U.S.-backed groups made up of tribesmen and former insurgents.

Al-Maliki has said the councils are needed as a backup for official security forces - similar to the Sunni groups that joined forces with the Americans against al-Qaida in Iraq.

But Talabani's office disagrees. In a letter to al-Maliki dated Nov. 18 and issued late Friday after al-Maliki made their quarrel public, the presidential council said the resources being funneled to the councils would be better used to bolster Iraq's security forces.

"It is our constitutional duty to demand that you intervene and order the relevant authorities to suspend the work of these councils until we arrive at an agreement that provides them with legal and administrative cover," according to the letter.

Al-Maliki did not specifically mention that letter in his televised news conference on Thursday. But he said Talabani and his two deputies were picking on the support councils while ignoring what he said was a long list of constitutional violations by the



Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Mailki (left) and President Jalal Talabani are pictured during a meeting in Baghdad on Friday. (AP ...

self-rule Kurdish region government in northern Iraq.

In response, Talabani, a Sunni Kurd, and his two deputies - vice presidents Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni Arab, and Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite - issued a statement late Friday criticizing al-Maliki for airing their differences in public.

The statement said the presidential council had decided to publicize its letter to al-Maliki "to avoid misunderstandings among members of the public about an issue (the support councils) on which it is exercising its right, indeed its duty, to supervise the workings of the state and its concern that the constitution and the law must be implemented."

If al-Maliki felt strongly about organizing pro-government tribesmen into groups, they should be part of civil society and not involved in security, it said.

Al-Maliki has for months been at loggerheads with Kurdish authorities. He said the presidential council should respond to Kurdish "violations" instead of criticizing the support councils.

He cited a decision by Kurdish authorities to sign contracts with foreign oil companies without the knowledge of the central government, to set up diplomatic representation offices in foreign capitals and to offer to host U.S. military bases on its terri-

tory.

The Kurds have faced persecution under successive Arab governments in Iraq. But many Iraqis now complain the Kurds are flexing their muscles too much, running their region as an independent nation and insisting on a representation in government that's disproportionate to the size of their community, which is about 20 percent of the population.

Massoud Barzani, the nationalist president of the self-rule Kurdish region, has complained that creating support councils in disputed areas, like the oil rich northern Kirkuk region claimed by the Kurds, has stoked conflict. The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the country's largest Shiite party and a close ally of the Kurds, has ordered the provincial governments it dominates in the Shiite south not to cooperate with the support councils.

Al-Maliki, like Sunni Arabs, objects to that plan and has recently called for amendments to the constitution to give the central government more powers.

The call riled the Kurds as well as their friends in the Supreme Council.

"We believe al-Maliki is trying to impose a tyranny of a sort," said Kurdish lawmaker Abdul-Khaleq Zangana.

KURDISH GLOBE

04 December 2008

"LET SHAHRISTANI SAY WHAT HE WANTS TO"

KRG to honor all oil contracts with foreign oil companies.

The Kurdish Globe

PM Barzani announces that Kurdistan nearing readiness to export over 100,000 barrels of oil daily; number to jump by end of '09.

Kurdistan Region Prime Min-

ister Nechirvan Barzani stated that all oil contracts the Kurdistan Regional Government has signed with foreign oil companies are legal and signed according to the law and Constitution, and his government will start exporting oil

to the world markets next year.

In a press conference after the 60th anniversary of the Human Rights Declaration, organized in Erbil on Tuesday, December 2, PM Barzani refuted Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani's



comments about the oil contracts between the KRG and international oil companies in the Egyptian capital City of Cairo.

"Let Shahrستاني say what he wants to, since all the oil contracts of the Regional Government are legal and signed according to the law and Constitution," said PM Barzani at the press conference.

He added that an active committee has been established to follow up on the contracts and the disagreements between Erbil and Baghdad about them.

Regarding the yet more controversial issue of exporting oil directly from Kurdistan Region to world markets, the Kurdish PM

told reporters that his government is preparing itself to start exporting oil next year.

"At the first stage, approximately 100,000 barrels of oil are to be exported daily, and that is subject to change." Shahrستاني has been the biggest opponent of the KRG's acts regarding oil investment and the contracts it signed with several foreign oil companies. He constantly denounced the contracts, describing them as illegal, and threatened to blacklist the oil companies from his ministry.

To solve those disputes with Baghdad, delegations from the KRG have visited Baghdad several

times during the past two years to negotiate a solution with Iraqi government officials.

The last meeting between Baghdad and Erbil officials about the oil-related issues was organized in Erbil as per a visit of Shahrستاني to Erbil last week. During the surprise visit, Shahrستاني met with Prime Minister Barzani and reached some agreements regarding exporting Kurdistan Region's oil products through Kirkuk pipes to the Turkish Ceyhan port.

Dr. Ashti Hawrami, KRG Minister of Natural Resources, has announced that the KRG will export 100,000 barrels of oil to the

world markets starting in 2009, and this number will increase to 250,000 barrels by the end of 2009.

"Exporting Kurdistan Region's oil will be in cooperation with the Iraqi Oil Ministry," said Hawrami.

He added that Kurdistan's oil export will start from the Tawke oil field in Duhok Province, for which the Iraq-Turkey pipelines are used. Later that year, Taq-Taq and Zakho oil fields will also be exporting oil through the same pipelines.

SPIEGEL 04 December 2008

TURKEY'S THREE GORGES

Environmentalists Accuse Ankara of Early Start on Mega Dam

By Daryl Lindsey

Turkey's Ilisu dam project in ancient Mesopotamia was already controversial due to the cultural sites it would flood. Now, though, environmentalists say construction has gone ahead in violation of conditions set by project-backers Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The agreement was clear: Turkey had to fulfill a list of strict environmental conditions laid out by Germany, Austria and Switzerland by next week's deadline. Otherwise, the trio of countries might cut funding for the controversial Ilisu dam project in eastern Turkey.

Now, though, environmental groups are complaining that the project has gone ahead even before meeting the criteria. And they say they have pictures to prove it.

"The information we are receiving from the area reveals that construction work has already started on the bank of the Tigris River," Erkut Erturk, the "Stop the Ilisu Dam" project coordinator at the Turkish organization Doga Dernegi said.

The photographs obtained by the group (see image) on Tuesday show that "bulldozers and shovels have begun the destruction of 10,000 years of world heritage to make way for the Ilisu dam," he says. The construction work would be in violation of the terms imposed by Germany, Austria and Switzerland as a condition of their funding.

Environmentalists have long decried the project as a miniature Turkish version of China's Three Gorges dam. In addition to environmental concerns, they have also highlighted the displacement and cultural destruction it is expected to cause.

Conflicting Reports

According to the Turkish daily *Hurriyet*, an official with the Turkish State Waterworks Authority claims that a concrete wall in the riverbed is a temporary bridge being used by construction vehicles to cross to the other side of the river in order to "speed up construction of facilities around the dam, such as residences and

roads," that will be removed when the actual construction starts. But the paper also quotes a construction engineering expert who says the structure looks like part of a dam, and not a bridge.

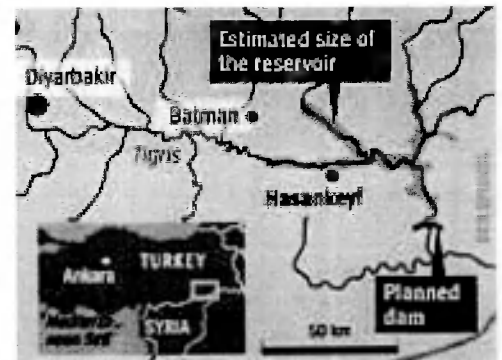
Information, however, has been contradictory. A spokesperson for Austria's Österreichische Kontrollbank, which is participating in the project, said his office had been informed by officials that the construction was a temporary bridge that had been built to help local citizens and that it was not part of the planned dam construction. "Nothing has changed in the position of Germany, Austria and Switzerland in regards to the project," Peter Gumpinger told the Austrian daily *Die Presse*.

But Ulrich Eichelmann of ECA Watch, an international watchdog of export credit agencies, described Kontrollbank's position as "ridiculous." Although the structure in the Tigris River was temporary in nature, he said it was clearly related to dam construction.

An "Affront"

Earlier this week Claudia Roth, the co-chair of Germany's Green Party and a longtime critic of the massive infrastructure project, called the development an "affront" and urged her government to immediately abandon its support for the controversial €1.2 billion project. The German government is planning to provide €100 million in export guarantees for the dam project. However, Berlin has repeatedly threatened to withdraw from providing credit for the dam if Ankara didn't meet the cultural and environmental conditions. Funding commitments from Austria and Switzerland are even higher.

The European countries are seeking safeguards for the cultural and environmental treasures in the area, a part of ancient Mesopotamia that is home to the city of Hasankeyf, whose ancient structures many groups believe should be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. There are also concerns about the displacement



of as many as 15,000 in the impoverished Kurdish region.

The Turkish government has promoted the project as one aimed at helping the region's ethnic Kurdish population, but the Environmental Defense Fund has warned that the majority of those displaced by the dam would be "ethnic Kurds who have long been abused by Turkish authorities."

Turkey wants to build the dam in order to provide water supplies and electricity to the country's southeast. It's part of the South East Anatolia Project (GAP), which includes plans to build 22 major dams, 19 hydroelectric plants and dozens of irrigation systems in the region.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported Tuesday that the three countries are continuing to negotiate behind the scenes in the hope of saving the deal, despite repeated violations of their stipulations by Ankara.

Ongoing talks, though, have irritated the dam's critics. Doga Dernegi officials said the European countries would be "accomplices in the elimination of world heritage" if they continued to provide credit backing for the massive project. And the European organization WEED said any move to delay the deadline for Turkey would be a "declaration of bankruptcy on the part of the Europeans."

TIME

December 04, 2008

When the U.S. Leaves, Will Iraq Strut or Stumble?

By Bobby Ghosh

From the crumbling Assyrian ramparts of Kirkuk's 3,000-year-old citadel, the giant open-air market snaking around its base seems the very picture of communal harmony: Kurdish, Turkoman and Arab shoppers navigate through narrow lanes, past stalls selling everything from fresh fruit to plastic flowers. My police escort, a Kurd, beams down with pride. "This is the perfect Iraq," he says. "Nobody angry, everybody happy."

At ground level, the market smells of bird droppings and open drains, and the mood is murkier. An Arab vendor of pomegranates loudly endorses my escort's claim that Kirkuk is a microcosm of an ideal Iraq. But when the policeman wanders out of earshot, he hisses, "Don't believe that Kurd. His people want Kirkuk for themselves. When the Americans leave, they will drive us out."

When the Americans leave: over more than five years, that phrase has cropped up in most of my conversations in Iraq. First spoken in hope, then inevitability, it is now uttered with a sense of urgency--and among some, alarm. Under the terms of the status-of-forces agreement ratified on Nov. 27 by the Iraqi parliament, U.S. troops must leave no later than the end of 2011; a referendum next summer could bring that deadline even closer. As the drawdown gathers speed, it will diminish the U.S.'s ability to influence Iraqi affairs. "Very soon, we will no longer have foreigners to blame for our problems--or to solve them," says Amar Fayyad, a political scientist at Baghdad University. "Iraq will be walking on its own feet."

Will it strut or stumble? When U.S. forces began to pull out of Baghdad and into suburban bases in 2005, the vacuum was filled by al-Qaeda bombers and armed Shi'ite and Sunni militants, who fought a two-year civil war. Now, however, the main vectors of sectarian violence have been turned back, weakened or co-opted. Although there has been no meaningful political or social reconciliation between the sects, their representatives in parliament have learned to form expedient alliances, which will doubtless continue as the parties jockey for power in post-occupation Iraq.

But don't expect peace to break out anytime soon. In a country seething with ancient animosities, it's almost certain that politics will be attended by violence. Ahead of provincial elections in January, there's a potentially explosive Shi'ite-vs.-Shi'ite clash brewing in the south. In Sunni areas to the west and north of Baghdad, a new alliance of tribal sheiks, many of them U.S.-funded ex-insurgents, are challenging the Sunni parties currently in power.

But it is in Kirkuk where the disputes seem most intractable. At its simplest, this is an old-fashioned turf war. The Kurds want the city and its hinterlands to be folded into



The citizens of Kirkuk—Arabs, Turkomans and Kurds—but and sell alongside one another in the ancient market, which is patrolled by Iraqi police.

the northern province of Kurdistan. Turkomans (a distinct ethnic group sharing ancestry with modern Turks) and Arabs would prefer it to remain outside Kurdish hegemony, in the separate Tamim province. Each group points out that the city was once ruled by its forebears. All know that outside Kirkuk is one of Iraq's largest oil fields. Also at stake is the larger, constitutional question of whether Iraq should have a powerful central government, favored by Turkomans and Arabs, or highly autonomous regions, as the Kurds wish. And finally, there are outside influences: Turkey backs the Turkomans and, with Iran, opposes greater Kurdish power.

The Risk of Civil War

The Kurds have frequently warned that there may be civil war if they don't get their way; there will be if they do, say the Turkomans and Arabs. The closest the communities have come to battle was in late July: after a suicide bomber struck at a Kurdish demonstration, killing 25, Kurds turned their wrath on Turkomans, though the violence quickly subsided. Since then, a war of words has broken out. Arab politicians in Baghdad were enraged when the provincial government of Kurdistan struck deals with oil companies without consulting Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government; this was seen as proof that the Kurds were trying to grab Kirkuk's resources for themselves.

If Baghdad's Shi'ites and Sunnis can, with some help from U.S. arms and cash, come to terms, can Kirkuk's three ethnic communities find political accommodation without American assistance? U.S. officials believe it's possible. But there is no clear answer to the question, Who really has the right to decide the city's future? The last official census was in 1957, when the Turkomans had a slight

edge over the Kurds, 40% to 35%. In the 1970s, Saddam Hussein sought to reorder the city's demographics by driving out some Kurds and Turkomans and busing up thousands of Arab families from the south.

When I first visited Kirkuk after the end of the U.S. war against Saddam, tens of thousands of families were streaming in from Kurdistan, all claiming to be returning natives. Many took refuge in or around the city's giant soccer stadium, expecting to be resettled soon. Protecting the shantytowns were the Kurdish militias known as the peshmerga, who had fought alongside the U.S. against Saddam. As loyal allies, the Kurds were demanding that the U.S. hand over Kirkuk.

Iraq's U.S.-appointed administrator, L. Paul Bremer, demurred, though he gave Kurds key political appointments. On my next visit two years later, Arab neighborhoods were being depleted as the Kurds sought to drive out Saddam's supporters. Turkomans and Arabs remained adamant that many of the Kurdish newcomers were not Kirkuk natives but had been sent to try to secure a majority before a new census and hence win a referendum, mandated by the new Iraqi constitution, on the city's future.

Today Kirkuk remains in limbo. No census has been taken, and several deadlines for the referendum have passed. There are still nearly 500 families in the soccer stadium. One resident told me that when some kids started a game there, a woman washing her dishes shooed them away, yelling, "Is this the place to be playing games?"

In Kirkuk, more dangerous games lie ahead--when the Americans leave.

TV Review | 'House of Saddam'

Hussein Family Values

By ALESSANDRA STANLEY

It's a festive lunch at home with the children, but Saddam Hussein's henchmen won't stop talking about work. The deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz (Makram J. Khoury), a napkin tucked into his collar to protect his shirt, frets about the United Nations' reaction to his government's use of chemical weapons in Northern Iraq. "They are calling it genocide," he says primly.

"All because I killed a few Kurds?" the defense minister, Ali Hassan al-Majid (Uri Gavriel) — also known as Chemical Ali — replies, his mouth still full. His nephew, who is married to the president's daughter, leans in and says with a smirk, "No, because you enjoyed it."

The lady of the house is annoyed. Sajida (Shohreh Aghdashloo) turns to her husband and says reproachfully, "This was supposed to be a family occasion."

"House of Saddam," a four-part mini-series that begins on Sunday on HBO, goes deep inside the presidential palace to depict Hussein's rise to power and his fall — through a gallows's trapdoor. It's not a sympathetic portrait, of course; it is an intimate close-up of a paranoid tyrant who relied on family ties — brothers, sons-in-law, cousins and intermarriage — to stay in power and keep his country in check.

The series doesn't excuse Hussein by exploring his psyche or childhood traumas, though his unhappy youth is sometimes evoked in passing. But it does explain, colorfully and unsparingly, how Hussein seized the presidency and held onto it, even after his devastating eight-year war with Iran that killed or maimed millions and bankrupted his country; his reckless and failed invasion of Kuwait; and his bizarre cat-and-mouse games with the United Nations and Washington.

Made jointly by the BBC and HBO, "House of Saddam" is well told and often lurid, a saga that blends the dirty work of despotism with the rituals of family gatherings, sibling rivalries and marital discontents. That alone will strike some viewers as an Iraqi version of "The Sopranos," minus the jokes.

In some ways it is closer to the 2004 German film "Downfall," which recounted Hitler's last delusional days in his bunker. Igal Naor, an Israeli actor of Iraqi Jewish descent, plays the role of Saddam much the way Bruno Ganz played Hitler: carefully. Mr. Naor, who speaks in a deep, guttural accent and pronounces Iraq the way Iraqis do ("Eerawk"), conveys the dictator's brutality, megalomania and

flashes of charisma without ever making him too likable or relatable.

By default, viewers are tempted to seek a proxy hero among the henchmen and relatives who bend to Hussein's will. But there are no heroes in this story. A selfish insularity and sense of entitlement clings even to the dictator's scorned first wife, Sajida, played with considerable charm by Ms. Aghdashloo. (This Iranian actress, who has huge, sultry eyes and a sulfurous Anne Bancroft voice, seems to play every Middle Eastern woman over 30.)

Sajida and her daughters flee Iraq when the bombing starts, but even in safety, one of the girls worries that they will be persecuted for taking treasury dollars and gold. "We have nothing that does not belong to us," her mother replies haughtily.

It's safe to say that no other dramatized biography on American television has focused this intensely and exclusively on the Iraqi side of the conflict. This is an account of the lead-up to war that doesn't feature Dick Cheney or Tony Blair; its few non-Iraqi characters — a United Nations weapons inspector, an American diplomat — have small roles.

Even President Bush is barely mentioned and seen only on Iraqi television. At the start of Part 1, the Iraqi dictator and a few loyalists stare at a television as Mr. Bush issues his final warning to Iraqis on March 17, 2003.

"The tyrant will soon be gone," he says. "The day of your liberation is near."

Then the story winds back to the summer of 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini is leading the Islamic revolution in Iran; in the garden of his mansion, Saddam is hosting a lavish birthday party for his youngest daughter and, on the side, overthrowing the sitting president, who is attending as a guest.

It's the kind of contrast found in "The Godfather": the camera shifts from a lavish outdoor feast, with girls in party dresses slaloming around elegantly dressed guests, to a dank sitting room where Hussein and his co-conspirators coolly order the president to resign for health reasons.

Hussein then orders a purge of all those in the ruling Baath Party who may have opposed his coup: show trials and executions that he personally oversees. In one scene the supposed traitors are lined up against a wall in an alley, and Hussein orders other party members to shoot their former colleagues in the head.

As time passes, Hussein's megalomania and

paranoia grow. When his own half-brother, tasked with presidential security, professes his lifelong loyalty, Saddam replies, "I know a traitor before he knows himself."

He falls for, and eventually marries, Samira (Christine Stephen-Daly), a blond, married schoolteacher, and courts her right in front of her husband, exercising his droit de despot. (When the husband tries to object, a presidential aide intervenes. "I would do nothing if I were you," he whispers silkily. "There will be compensation.")

The series doesn't dwell at length on Hussein's worst atrocities: there are television images of mass graves and a scene of bulldozers razing a town where Islamic rebels tried to assassinate him in 1988, but those serve as flash cards of barbarity. Mostly the focus remains on inner-circle intrigue and the choking fear that veins even the most convivial gatherings.

Hussein's mood swings are not the only menace: Philip Arditti is compellingly repellent as Uday, his elder son, an unfettered psychopath who rapes maids and murdered his father's favorite servant in 1988. (That did get his father's attention.)

Weapons of mass destruction play almost no role in this melodrama, perhaps because the Iraqi leader didn't have them. "The House of Saddam" doesn't fully explain why Hussein kept toying with United Nations inspectors and goaded the United States into a war he knew he couldn't win. But the depiction of his shrewdness and irrationality says a lot.

"House of Saddam" isn't about Islamic terrorism or American foreign policy, it's about the private life of a deadly dictator who self-destructed at a cost to Iraq — and to the United States — that has yet to be calculated.

HOUSE OF SADDAM

HBO, Sunday nights at 9, Eastern and Pacific times; 8, Central time.

Directed by Alex Holmes and Jim O'Hanlon; written by Mr. Holmes and Stephen Butchard; Mr. Holmes and Hilary Salmon, executive producers; Steve Lightfoot, producer. Produced by HBO Films and the BBC.

WITH: Igal Naor (Saddam Hussein), Shohreh Aghdashloo (Sajida), Philip Arditti (Uday), Said Taghmaoui (Barzan Ibrahim), Makram J. Khoury (Tariq Aziz), Uri Gavriel (Ali Hassan al-Majid) and Christine Stephen-Daly (Samira).

Baghdad and Kurds edge closer to signing oil export pact

By Anna Fifield in Beirut, Javier Blas in London and Delphine Strauss in Ankara

Iraq's central government and regional authorities in Kurdistan are moving closer to signing a long-awaited oil deal that could pave the way for exports from the northern region's oil fields early next year.

Following last week's agreement to link two northern oil fields to the main pipeline to Turkey, government

and oil company officials say that a broader agreement on exports could be reached as soon as this month. Signs of progress come after months of bitter disputes that have hindered the passage of Iraq's hydrocarbons law, which is crucial to greater international involvement in the country's oil and gas sectors. They also come

as falling oil prices, which hit a near four-year low of \$45.30 a barrel yesterday, rapidly erode Iraq's revenues.

But given the long history of disagreements and delays, analysts are cautioning against expecting too much too soon. "This is a big step forward for exports of Kurdish oil, which is

really Iraqi oil," said Muhammad-Ali Zainy of the Centre for Global Energy Studies in London. "But this is an agreement on the hardware. We still need to see if they can agree on the software."

Hussain al-Shahristani, the Iraqi oil minister, and Nechiravan Barzani, the Kurdish prime minister, said last

week they had agreed in principle to join the Tawke and Taq Taq oil fields in Kurdistan to Iraq's main northern export pipeline, which runs to the Turkish port of Ceyhan.

The more difficult issues, particularly revenue sharing, have yet to be resolved.

"We still have some technical issues to discuss, so even if we link the pipelines this does not mean that we can begin oil exports to the outside world," Fuad Hussein, chief of staff to the Kurdish president, told the Financial Times.

However, Mr Hussein and other officials suggested that resolving these issues, which are mainly financial, might take only a few weeks.

Analysts are sceptical that progress can be made so quickly.

"We could see it happen if there is significant political will on both sides, but there is a host of stumbling blocks that have been holding this up,"

said Raad Alkadiri, head of the Iraq advisory service at PFC Energy, a consultancy. He cited differing opinions over who would calculate, control and distribute the revenues.

Under Iraq's draft hydrocarbons law, Kurdistan would receive 17 per cent of federal oil revenues. Kurds contend that they deserve more, while some Arabs argue they should get less.

Iraq has the world's third-largest proven oil reserves, at 115bn barrels. It pumped about 2.3m barrels per day in October, down slightly from this summer's 2.5m b/d, which was the highest level since the US-led invasion in 2003, according to the International Energy Agency.

Investment in the oil sector has been hindered by disagreements over the proposed new hydrocarbons law, which would outline foreign participation in the oil and gas industries and how to share the revenues between

Iraq's provinces.

During the 18-month stalemate, the semi-autonomous Kurdistan regional government has enacted its own hydrocarbons law and has independently signed more than 20 exploration and development deals in its territory, which Baghdad considers illegal.

However, the Tawke field, operated by Norway's Det Norske Oljeselskap, and Taq Taq, a joint venture between Turkey's Genel Enerji and Swiss-Canadian Addax Pet-ro-l-eum, were cleared for export before Kurdistan introduced its law.

Analysts say that an agreement covering only the early contracts would be implicitly admitting that the later contracts were illegal, and the Kurds might have to give up some or all of the exploration contracts agreed with companies including Austria's OMV, MOL of Hungary, and India's Heritage.

That would be a high price for Kurdistan to pay, analysts say. But the Kurdish government has told DNO to expect exports from the Tawke oil field to begin during the first quarter of next year, the Norwegian company said, although it warned that it had yet to receive proper authorisation.

Linking Tawke to the northern pipeline could help Iraq sustain oil flows because the field is far from the area where the pipeline is frequently attacked by the Kurdish PKK rebel group.

Although Turkey would in principle buy or export the KRG's oil and gas, it will not do so without Baghdad's authorisation.

The two fields would probably produce about 60,000b/d each, but analysts estimate that their combined output could reach 250,000b/d by the end of next year. *Additional reporting by Delphine Strauss in Ankara*

Guardian

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Rani Alaaldin

Maliki's survival game

The Iraqi prime minister has had some successes but it is still unclear how his party will fare in next year's elections

THE SIGNING of the Sofa agreement between the US and Iraq constitutes another of the famous Iraqi "milestones".

While Sofa may put Iraqis back in control, giving them responsibility for the future of their country, it still leaves a fragile and sensitive Iraqi political arena that could explode at any point.

Chief among the concerns is the current state of the relationship between prime minister Maliki, his central government, and his political rivals. Iraq's politicians are still the same Iraqi politicians that came to power in the aftermath of 2003: power hungry, intent on survival, and keen to play their part in developing Iraq towards prosperity.

The stage is being set for January 2009 when the country goes to the polls in provincial elections. Maliki is undoubtedly one of those politicians intent on survival. There are several indications that he has the tact and strategy necessary to keep him going:

1. He played hardball on Sofa, forcing concessions that previously were thought unachievable, and Sofa is just one of his successes this year.
2. He has taken a leading and successful role in various unstable and volatile areas, including Basra, where he won praise among the locals for ridding the area of the terrorist elements, particularly among the impoverished of Basra, who once were regarded as Moqtada al-Sadr's power base.
3. He has even attempted to assert government control over provinces previously deemed beyond the central government's sphere of influence. This includes the Diyala province where, earlier this year, Maliki's security operations included arresting and detaining political rivals in Baquba and hundreds of the Sunni "Sons of Iraq", who Maliki regards as an anti-government/anti-Dawa insurgency in the making.
4. In the disputed Khanaqin district of Diyala, security has rarely been compromised. Maliki nevertheless conducted so-called security operations in the area, creating a standoff with Kurdish forces – responsible for maintaining security – and evicting them from official buildings. While this may have damaged relations with the Kurds, anti-Kurdish sentiments are running throughout the country. The Sunni Arabs of Diyala are fearful of Kurdish aspirations to annex Khanaqin and Maliki has played to such fears. The Kurds in the last local elections formed a united list with the Arabs of Diyala but this will be unlikely in the next elections. Another goal to Maliki.

On the other hand, though, it could be argued that Maliki is playing with fire and digging his own grave.

His Dawa party is much weaker and smaller than the political machines of the ISCI and Kurdish Alliance. Both have militias or armed forces. Dawa has none.

Innovatively, Maliki has created tribal Support Councils. These are tribal groups established in an array of provinces to, as maintained by Maliki, comple-

ment and act as an extension of the Sunni Awakening Movement. The Support Councils, however, are paid for by Maliki's office. They are loyal to, and report only to, Maliki himself.

ISCI, the Kurdish Alliance and numerous others fiercely condemn the establishment of the Support Councils. They argue that the councils have been used unnecessarily in secure ISCI and Kurdish dominated areas and fear they will be used to boost Maliki's party in next year's elections. They have been established in majority Kurdish areas of oil rich Kirkuk and the Nineveh province.

Opponents call the councils armed militias. Maliki disputes this, arguing that his office has not "distributed" any weapons to the councils (in Iraq there is currently a thriving black market for weapons and almost every male adult has a weapon).

There is no legal cover for these councils. Iraq's three-member presidential council has publicly berated Maliki and ordered him to disband the councils or find legal coverage for them. Extraordinarily, Iraq's president now wants to take Maliki to the country's federal court over the issue.

Although Iraqi politics is far from a simple matter, there are two scenarios for Maliki. The first is that he will emerge as a hardheaded leader that looks and acts beyond sectarian differences that still dominate the Iraqi political arena. He has acted against the Shias, he has acted against the Kurds, and he has acted against the Sunnis. Maliki may well get votes from across the political board, irrespective of ethnic or sectarian loyalties but the question remains as to whether Iraqi democracy has moved on from a loyalty-based electoral system – that is, a system whereby Kurd only votes Kurd, Sunni only votes Sunni, and Shia only votes Shia. If not, then at the very least Maliki may still have propelled his Dawa party closer towards the popular standing and political strength of ISCI, both in significance and manpower. It should also be remembered that support for Maliki and his initiatives does not necessarily mean votes for his Dawa party, the Iraqi electorate may turn out to be much more sophisticated than that.

The second scenario would suggest that Maliki has gradually been digging his grave and showed his true colours to his political rivals. He has on numerous occasions been labelled a dictator in disguise, acting beyond the ambit of the Iraqi constitution. The establishment of Support Councils may be a catalyst for a wider conflict between the various political groups.

ISCI/Kurdish cooperation still remains strong and with ISCI also feeling the Support Councils breathing down its neck, the two may unite together to obliterate Dawa from Iraqi politics. ISCI wants a super-autonomous Shia south, akin to the Kurdish autonomous zone in the north, and sees the councils as a threat to this.

Regardless, it is now simply about survival for Maliki. They say the desperate man is the most dangerous man. Maliki has developed his strategy with skill, and pursued it without compromise. He may come out prosperous, or he may be done and dusted. He will not, in any case, go out without a fight.



ÖCALAN PORTE PLAINTE CONTRE LA GRÈCE POUR NE PAS L'AVOIR PROTÉGÉ DES TURCS

ATHENES, 4 déc 2008 (AFP) –

LE CHEF rebelle kurde emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan a porté plainte contre la Grèce, estimant que cette dernière ne l'a pas protégé comme elle s'était selon lui engagée à la faire en 1999, permettant ainsi sa capture par la Turquie, a-t-on appris jeudi de source judiciaire.

Un avocat grec agissant pour M. Öcalan, Yiannis Rahiotis, a déposé une plainte "symbolique" pour réclamer une compensation de 20.100 euros à Athènes, coupable selon lui d'avoir trahi le leader kurde alors qu'elle lui avait auparavant garanti qu'elle assurerait sa sécurité, selon la même source.

Traqué par des agents turcs, Abdullah Öcalan s'est caché à Athènes pendant deux jours en 1999, avant d'être aidé par les services de renseignements grecs à gagner le Kenya, où il a finalement été arrêté le 15 février par des agents turcs avec l'aide des services de renseignement américains.

Jugé en Turquie, le fondateur et chef du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) a été condamné à mort pour "séparatisme", une peine commuée en prison à perpétuité après l'abolition de la peine de mort par Ankara, une réforme demandée par l'Union européenne (UE) que la Turquie souhaite intégrer.

Trois ministres grecs ont été démis de leur fonction et treize personnes, dont Abdullah Öcalan, jugées ensuite pour son entrée illégale dans le pays à la suite de cette affaire qui s'est avérée un désastre diplomatique pour la Grèce.

Le PKK, classé organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, mène depuis 1984 une rébellion armée qui a coûté la vie à plus de 40.000 personnes.



TURQUIE: L'EX-DÉPUTÉE KURDE LEYLA ZANA CONDAMNÉE À 10 ANS DE PRISON

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 4 déc 2008 (AFP) –

UN TRIBUNAL turc a condamné jeudi à 10 ans de prison l'ancienne députée kurde Leyla Zana pour appartenance au groupe rebelle kurde du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et pour avoir diffusé sa propagande.

Le tribunal de Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est anatolien, en majorité peuplé de Kurdes, a estimé que Mme Zana avait violé neuf fois le code pénal et la loi anti-terrorisme en exprimant indirectement dans des discours son soutien au PKK et à son chef emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan.

Mme Zana, qui a déjà passé une décennie en prison (1994-2004) avec trois autres ex-députés kurdes pour collusion avec le PKK, n'a pas assisté à l'au-

dience.

Son avocat, Me Cabbar Leygara, a affirmé aux journalistes présents qu'il ferait appel de cette décision et a accusé la cour d'avoir bafoué les droits de la défense.

Le PKK, classé organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'indépendance du sud-est anatolien, un conflit qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts selon les chiffres officiels.

Le Parlement européen a attribué en 1995 le Prix Sakharov des droits de l'Homme à Leyla Zana.



Aïd al-Adha: la rébellion kurde du PKK décrète un cessez-le-feu de 9 jours

ERBIL (Irak), 7 déc 2008 (AFP)

LES SEPARATISTES kurdes du PKK, en lutte contre l'armée turque, ont annoncé dimanche un cessez-le feu de neuf jours à l'occasion de la fête musulmane de l'Aïd al-Adha.

"Nous annonçons un cessez-le-feu et l'arrêt des opérations militaires contre l'armée turque à partir de ce soir (dimanche) et pour une durée de neuf jours à l'occasion de l'Aïd al-Adha, a affirmé par téléphone à l'AFP Ahmad Daniss, chargé des relations extérieures du PKK et qui se trouve dans les Monts Qandil, à la confluence de l'Irak, de l'Iran et de la Turquie.

"Par ce geste, nous voulons montrer notre détermination pour la paix et à trouver une solution politique au problème. Nous espérons que la Turquie prendra des mesures pour ouvrir la porte du dialogue plutôt que celle de l'option militaire", a-t-il ajouté.

En septembre, les rebelles kurdes de Turquie avaient annoncé un cessez-le feu dans le cadre des fêtes célébrant la fin du ramadan.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Irak, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, qui a fait plusieurs dizaines de milliers de morts.

Les rebelles kurdes sont notamment basés en Irak d'où ils procèdent à des incursions en territoire turc. Ankara reproche à Bagdad de ne pas faire assez pour empêcher ces attaques et les forces armées turques mènent régulièrement des opérations contre des positions du PKK dans le Kurdistan irakien, pour lesquelles elles disposent de renseignements fournis par les États-Unis. Par ailleurs, avec le soutien actif de Washington, l'Irak et la Turquie ont franchi mi-novembre une étape supplémentaire dans leur collaboration contre le PKK avec la création d'un comité conjoint destiné à contrecarrer ses activités.



IRAK: LES KURDES LÈVENT LES RESTRICTIONS À L'ENTRÉE DE LEUR TERRITOIRE

ERBIL (Irak), 7 déc 2008 (AFP) –

LES AUTORITES du Kurdistan autonome irakien ont levé début décembre les sévères restrictions imposées depuis deux ans à l'entrée de leur territoire aux Irakiens venant d'autres provinces, a annoncé dimanche à l'AFP le gouverneur d'Erbil Nouzad Hadi.

"Depuis le 1er décembre, nous avons pris de nouvelles dispositions facilitant l'entrée dans notre région", a-t-il déclaré.

"Nous avons construit des postes-frontières à l'entrée de notre territoire et nous avons formé un grand nombre d'agents d'Assayach (sécurité kurde, ndlr) pour traiter par ordinateur les documents d'identité et interroger les arrivants",



a expliqué M. Hadi.

Il a précisé qu'une carte de séjour était délivrée et qu'elle devait être rendue à la sortie mais toutes les autres mesures ont été annulées.

C'est "en raison de la situation sécuritaire que des mesures très strictes et sévères avaient été décidées", a rappelé le gouverneur.

En novembre 2006, en plein conflit entre chiites et sunnites, les trois provinces kurdes, qui jouissent d'une grande autonomie, avaient décidé de limiter l'entrée des réfugiés irakiens fuyant les violences qui s'étaient emparées du reste du

pays.

Pour entrer au Kurdistan, îlot relativement protégé, il fallait posséder une garantie de la part d'un fonctionnaire du gouvernement kurde et un engagement de l'hôte kurde qui accueillait des réfugiés ayant fui la violence. La "carte de séjour" était renouvelable tous les mois.

Accusé par les Kurdes d'avoir constitué des milices illégales, le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki avait rétorqué que les mesures limitant l'entrée au Kurdistan d'autres citoyens irakiens l'étaient tout autant.

Au moins 55 morts dans un attentat suicide à Kirkouk

AFP

KIRKOUK (Irak) 11 décembre 2008 (AFP)

AU MOINS 55 personnes ont été tuées et 95 blessées dans un attentat perpétré jeudi dans un restaurant où des familles déjeunaient près de Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, au dernier jour de la fête musulmane d'Al-Adha, dans l'attaque la plus meurtrière depuis six mois.

"Au moins 55 personnes ont été tuées et 95 blessées dans l'attentat", a indiqué à l'AFP le général Torhane Youssef, le numéro deux de la police de Kirkouk, à 255 km au nord de Bagdad.

Le bilan précédent faisait état de 45 morts et de 93 blessés.

Au moment de l'attentat, des chefs de tribus déjeunaient avec des représentants du président irakien, Jalal Talabani (un Kurde), pour évoquer la situation à Kirkouk. Aucun n'a été atteint car ils se trouvaient dans une autre salle, a indiqué à l'AFP le cheikh Ali Hussein al-Joubouri.

En revanche, quatre gardes du corps des chefs tribaux ont été blessés.

L'attentat s'est produit en début d'après-midi à une heure de forte affluence dans un des plus grands restaurants de la province, à une quinzaine de km au nord de la ville de Kirkouk, sur une route contrôlée par les peshmergas (combattants kurdes).

Le restaurant "Abdallah" était connu pour accueillir toutes les communautés, sunnite, kurde et turcomane.

sa ceinture d'explosifs au milieu de la salle où étaient réunies hommes, femmes et enfants. L'attentat s'est produit au dernier jour de la fête d'Al-Adha, la principale fête du calendrier musulman.

Peu après l'attentat, plusieurs victimes étaient allongées par terre, le visage en sang, selon un journaliste de l'AFP sur place.

"Il y a de plus en plus de victimes qui arrivent", a déclaré à l'AFP le docteur Mohammed Abdallah, de l'hôpital principal de Kirkouk.



Près de l'entrée des urgences, un petit garçon de 5 ans pleure. Il dit avoir perdu ses parents.

Tout près, Rezkar Mahmoud, un Kurde de 24 ans, est blessé à la jambe. Il déjeunait avec son père, sa femme et ses enfants au moment de l'explosion.

"Le restaurant était plein quand l'explosion a eu lieu. Elle a fait voler en éclats les vitres et détruit des murs", dit-il. "Je ne sais pas où sont mes enfants et mon père".

"J'ai perdu ma petite-fille. Elle avait 4 ans", dit Reskiya Oji, une Irakienne turcomane de 49 ans, blessée au bras et à la jambe. "Je ne sais pas ce qui est arrivé à mes deux fils", ajoute-t-elle, allongée sur un lit, les vêtements maculés de sang.

Pour répondre à l'afflux de victimes, la police a appelé la population à venir à l'hôpital faire don de son sang.

Des violences, notamment des attentats, ont épisodiquement lieu à Kirkouk, où un conflit oppose les communautés kurde, arabe et turcomane.

L'attentat du restaurant "Abdallah" est le plus meurtrier en Irak depuis le double attentat sur le marché d'Azamiyah, à Bagdad, qui avait fait 28 morts et des dizaines de blessés le 10 novembre.

Auparavant, le 17 juin, 63 (BIEN 63) Irakiens avaient péri et 75 avaient été blessés dans un attentat près d'un marché du quartier Al-Hourriyah, à Bagdad.

Mais le 1er février a été la journée d'attentats la plus meurtrière en 2008: 98 personnes avaient été tuées dans deux attentats suicide perpétrés sur des marchés de Bagdad. 208 Irakiens avaient été blessés.

Attentat en Irak



Très riche en pétrole, la province de Kirkouk compte quelque 900.000 habitants et plusieurs communautés: des Kurdes, en nombre croissant, des Turcomans, qui se considèrent comme ses habitants historiques, des Assyro-chaldéens (chrétiens) ou des Arabes, souvent arrivés à l'occasion de la politique d'arabisation forcée pratiquée par Saddam Hussein.

L'un des serveurs du restaurant, Abbas Fadel, a raconté qu'un kamikaze a actionné

Le premier ministre turc ne convainc plus

TURQUIE

Absence de réformes européennes, discours nationaliste, réactions autoritaires... Les griefs s'accumulent contre Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Istanbul

« L'ADHÉSION à l'Union européenne n'est pas une question de stratégie mais de démocratie », a mis en garde la semaine dernière l'eurodéputé Joost Lagendijk, président de la commission parlementaire mixte UE-Turquie, à Ankara. « Il est grand temps de faire preuve de courage politique, car la frustration à Bruxelles augmente », précise-t-il. Ce rappel à l'ordre au gouvernement islamo-conservateur vient s'ajouter à la longue liste de griefs qui s'accumulent contre le premier ministre turc. Après avoir été dans le collimateur de la justice et de l'armée et avoir échappé in extremis à la fermeture de sa formation (AKP, Parti de la justice et du développement) cet été, Recep Tayyip Erdogan doit désormais faire face à un nouveau front, ouvert par ses anciens alliés. Les milieux libéraux, qui l'avaient soutenu pour ses engagements proeuropéens passés, montent au créneau.

« AKP en fin de course »

Les réactions du premier ministre face aux émeutes dans les

régions kurdes, ces dernières semaines, ont, semble-t-il, fait déborder la coupe. « Nous avons dit, une nation, un drapeau, une patrie et un État. Ceux qui ne sont pas d'accord devraient partir », a-t-il martelé. Cette diatribe illustre le revirement opéré depuis 2005, quand il promettait de résoudre la question kurde « par davantage de démocratie ». Le mois dernier, sa prise de position en faveur d'un « citoyen turc » qui avait tiré au fusil à pompe contre des manifestants du parti pro-kurde a également déclenché un tollé. « La patience a ses limites », avait-il lancé. Autant de signes, pour ces détracteurs, que le premier ministre aligne sa politique sur celle prônée par l'état-major.

Pour ne rien arranger, le divorce avec les médias est consommé. L'accréditation auprès du gouvernement de sept journalistes, accusés d'avoir colporté de fausses informations, a été supprimée du jour au lendemain. « Les médias concernés n'ont qu'à envoyer d'autres reporters », a-t-il rétorqué, jeudi dernier, à ceux qui lui reprochent son autoritarisme. Les allégations du puissant groupe de presse Dogan sur une éventuelle implication des membres de son entourage dans une affaire de corruption d'une association caritative musulmane en Allemagne l'avaient également mis hors de lui. Les coups de

sang du charismatique chef du gouvernement sont légendaires.

« L'AKP est en fin de course », balaye d'un revers de la main Cengiz Aktar, professeur à l'université de Bahçesehir, à Istanbul. De son côté, Mehmet Altan assure qu'« un nouveau parti compatible avec l'Union européenne doit émerger ». En juillet 2007, les troupes d'Erdogan avaient remporté 47 % des voix. Les bonnes performances de l'économie turque, canalisée par le FMI et les négociations avec l'UE, avaient largement contribué à ce plébiscite. Mais là aussi, avec la crise mondiale, les milieux d'affaires turcs, qui soutenaient le gouvernement tant qu'il suivait la feuille de route dressée par le Fonds monétaire international, retirent à leur tour leur confiance.

La Tüsiad, la puissante organisation patronale, est exaspérée : le gouvernement tergiverse et n'a toujours pas signé un nouvel accord avec l'institution monétaire alors que le dernier prêt a expiré en mai. Le chômage augmente, les fermetures d'usine aussi. « Même si l'AKP est toujours le numéro 1 en Turquie, la crise va accentuer les mécontentements », pronostique Ufuk Uras. Malgré la baisse enregistrée dans les sondages, Recep Tayyip Erdogan reste sûr de son assise populaire. Comme à son habitude, répondant à ses censeurs par la bravade, il s'est engagé à quitter la présidence de son parti, si ce dernier ne remportait pas les élections municipales, en mars 2009.

LAURE MARCHAND



ONZE KURDES JUGÉS POUR DES ATTENTATS CONTRE DES CIBLES TURQUES EN FRANCE

PARIS, 8 décembre 2008 (AFP)

LE PROCES de onze jeunes Kurdes, présumés proches du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et soupçonnés d'avoir jeté des cocktails Molotov contre deux cafés et une association turcs à Bordeaux (sud-ouest) au printemps 2007, a débuté lundi à Paris.

Tandis que trois prévenus comparaissaient détenus, sept autres comparaissaient libres. Le onzième ne s'est pas présenté à l'audience.

Pour la plupart âgés d'une vingtaine d'années, ils sont poursuivis pour des faits de "dégradation", de "détention d'explosifs" et/ou d'"association de malfaiteurs à visée terroriste".

Certains, soupçonnés d'avoir collecté des fonds au profit du PKK, sont également jugés pour "financement du terrorisme".

La plupart avaient été interpellés en juin 2007 en banlieue parisienne, dans les régions de Bordeaux et de Marseille (sud-est).

Ils sont soupçonnés d'avoir jeté des cocktails Molotov à Bordeaux contre deux

bars turcs --le "Football Café" le 5 mars 2007 et "Chez Musa" le 24 avril 2007-- ainsi que contre une association culturelle turque le 17 mars.

Pour les enquêteurs, tous sont membres des "Jeunesses apoistes", organisation de jeunesse du PKK, ainsi nommée en référence au chef rebelle kurde Abdullah Öcalan surnommé "Apo", condamné à la prison à vie en Turquie, où il est détenu depuis 1999.

Les rebelles du PKK ont pris les armes en 1984 contre le pouvoir central d'Ankara pour la création d'un Etat kurde indépendant dans le sud-est anatolien, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne. Le conflit a fait environ 37.000 morts.

Si les avocats de la défense reconnaissent que les prévenus ont "une conscience politique", ils dénoncent un dossier outrageusement "gonflé" par l'accusation.

Près de deux cents villages menacés par un projet de barrage en Turquie

HASANKEYF

ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

« *Tant que l'eau n'arrivera pas jusqu'ici, je ne bougerai pas* », clame Hüseyin. Les hommes agglutinés dans le café enfumé d'Hasankeyf en rient. Après tout, leur petite cité plusieurs fois millénaire léchée par les eaux du Tigre vit depuis cinquante ans sous la menace d'un projet de barrage hydroélectrique de 1 200 mégawatts et ils sont toujours là.

Pourtant, cette fois, les choses se précisent. Selon les opposants, les premières coulées de béton ont eu lieu fin novembre, comme en témoignent des clichés pris sur le site d'Illisu. « *Une simple passerelle au-dessus du fleuve pour faciliter*

l'accès », se défendent les bailleurs. Mais les gendarmes, nerveux, barrent l'accès du village d'Illisu aux curieux. Dans ce hameau, une équipe d'ingénieurs allemands n'attend plus que le signal pour lancer la construction d'un barrage haut de 135 mètres, avec un lac de stockage de 10 milliards de mètres cubes d'eau.

Ce chantier colossal est assuré par un consortium d'entreprises suisses, allemandes et autrichiennes, financées par une série de banques européennes, dont la Société générale, pour un coût total de près de 1,3 milliard d'euros. Hasankeyf et ses neuf mille ans d'histoire, les restes du pont médiéval qui, autrefois, enjambait le fleuve, les grottes troglodytes et les mosaïques découvertes au mois de novembre seront alors submergés, sous 30 mètres d'eau.

Depuis l'inauguration officielle du chantier par le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, en 2006, le barrage d'Illisu fait face à une vague de mobilisation locale et internationale. Les ONG ont sillonné l'Europe pour réclamer l'abandon pur et simple de ce projet qui met en danger Hasankeyf, joyau du patrimoine historique de la région, et des populations locales déjà fragilisées. Les conséquences sur l'environnement seront catastrophiques et des solutions



alternatives à ce barrage sont possibles, estiment-elles, s'appuyant sur de nombreux rapports d'experts.

Sous la pression, les trois agences de crédit à l'exportation qui garantissent le barrage ont suspendu les travaux et leurs gouvernements ont exigé de la Turquie qu'elle satisfasse à une série de 153 critères sociaux, environnementaux et culturels. Malgré ce rappel à l'ordre sans précédent, l'espoir est vite retombé. « *Il n'y a eu aucun changement*, constate, amer, le maire d'Hasankeyf, Vahap Kusen. *Personne ne sait s'ils vont abandonner ou laisser un nouveau délai à la Turquie.* »

« Génocide culturel »

L'ultimatum a expiré lundi 8 décembre. « *Il n'y a pas eu de réaction. Cela fait longtemps que nous disons qu'il ne faut pas attendre une volonté politique de la part de la Turquie*, rappelait, lundi, Anne-Kathrin Glatz, secrétaire politique de la Déclaration de Berne, organisation suisse qui milite pour l'abandon du projet. *Il appartient aux agences de crédit à l'export de poser leurs conditions.* »

Mais en coulisses, les Etats concernés se montrent peu enclins à faire pression sur la Turquie. « *Le barrage sera construit* », assurait-on dans l'entourage du président de la Confédération suisse Pascal Couchepin, en visite en Turquie début novembre. « *Un retrait paraît très improbable,*

confirme Ercan Ayboga, porte-parole de la Plate-forme pour Hasankeyf. *Les intérêts économiques et stratégiques sont bien trop importants pour cela.* » Un nouveau délai pourrait être octroyé à Ankara.

Si le barrage d'Illisu voit le jour, pas moins de 199 villages disparaîtront et quelque 70 000 habitants de la région, en majorité kurdes, seront déplacés. Mais à Illisu, les habitants expropriés n'ont toujours pas été dédommagés. A Hasankeyf, un bureau d'information a bien ouvert en face du café et les villageois peuvent venir admirer les maquettes des maisons du « Nouveau Hasankeyf » qui doit être construit sur la colline d'en face, mais le souci des habitants est d'abord financier. « *Ils veulent une maison gratuite mais les conditions du dédommagement ne sont pas encore claires*, admet Arif Ayhan, le responsable du bureau. *Ils demandent aussi que l'on construise un pont, vital pour le nouveau village. Ici les gens sont pauvres, beaucoup partiront vers les grandes villes. Peut-être que moi aussi je partirai, mon frère est à Istanbul...* »

Le maire de Batman, la grande ville voisine, partage la même crainte. « *Ma ville est connue dans tout le pays pour les suicides de jeunes filles, mais l'immigration de nouvelles populations, inadaptées au mode de vie urbain, va encore augmenter ce type de problèmes* », se désole Hüseyin Kalkan. Il se dit prêt à mener un « jeûne de la mort » si le barrage est construit et implore les Européens de renoncer à ce « *génocide culturel* ». ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

LE FIGARO 8 décembre 2008

Le pouvoir iranien divisé par l'ouverture américaine

IRAN

Embarrassé, le régime iranien ne sait pas comment répondre à une initiative américaine qui risquerait de saper les fondements de la République islamique.

L'armée iranienne a procédé à un nouvel essai de missile sol-sol samedi, lors de manœuvres en mer d'Oman. «*Le Nasr-2 a été tiré depuis un bâtiment de guerre, a atteint sa cible située à une distance de 30 km et l'a détruite*», écrit l'agence officielle Irna.

De notre envoyé spécial à Téhéran

UN MOIS après l'élection de Barack Obama, l'espoir d'une normalisation des relations entre l'Iran et les États-Unis semble retombé. «*Traditionnellement, il y a une grande différence entre les*

promesses électorales et la politique de celui qui occupe la Maison-Blanche», déclare au Figaro Manouchehr Mottaki, le ministre des Affaires étrangères iranien.

Pendant la campagne présidentielle, le candidat démocrate s'était dit prêt à ouvrir un dialogue «*sans préconditions*» avec l'Iran,

pays avec lequel Washington n'a plus de relations diplomatiques depuis l'avènement de la République islamique en 1979. Mais sitôt élu, Obama a douché ces espoirs, en affirmant que l'enrichissement d'uranium par l'Iran était «*inacceptable*». Téhéran est soupçonné par les États-Unis et l'Union européenne de poursuivre des activités nucléaires à des fins militaires et, à ce titre, est frappé par un régime de sanctions internationales.

Les relations avec le «*Grand Satan*» constituent l'un des sujets de contentieux les plus profonds entre les multiples centres du pou-

voir. Comment répondre au geste que les États-Unis devraient faire après le 20 janvier, date de l'investiture du président Obama?

Optimistes, ultras et réalistes

Autour de ce dilemme, trois écoles de pensée s'affrontent, selon un expert du système iranien. «*Les optimistes estiment qu'il faut saisir cette occasion en or, maintenant que Bush est parti. Les ultraradicaux, au contraire, pensent que, quel que soit leur président, les États-Unis ne reconnaîtront jamais la République islamique. Le président Ahmadinejad n'est pas loin de cette thèse,*

même si, pour des raisons électorales, il aimerait que Washington fasse des gestes envers l'Iran avant la présidentielle de juin 2009. Ainsi pourrait-il dire à son peuple: regardez, ma fermeté a payé. Et enfin, il y a les réalistes pour qui tout dépendra de l'offre américaine.» Le guide de la révolution et réel détenteur du pouvoir, Ali Khamenei, partagerait cette dernière position.

«*Si les Américains reconnaissent le rôle stabilisateur de l'Iran en Irak et en Afghanistan, et se déclarent prêts à réduire les sanctions américaines contre nous, alors le Guide pourrait donner son feu vert au processus de normalisation*», ajoute un de ses récents visiteurs. Mais ce dont Ali Khamenei ne veut pas, selon cette source, c'est d'«*une approche sélective*» des dif-

férends qui opposent Téhéran aux Américains. «*Les Iraniens veulent tout mettre sur la table*», estime Saddegh Kharrazi.

Or, à court terme, un premier geste pourrait être l'ouverture à Téhéran d'une section d'intérêts

américains. L'Iran redoute le piège. «*Voir des centaines d'Iraniens faire la queue pour obtenir un visa américain, en termes d'image, c'est une catastrophe que le régime ne peut accepter*», reconnaît un officiel sous le couvert de l'anonymat. Dans ces conditions, à court terme, de réelles avancées sont peu probables. D'autant que Washington pourrait être tenté d'attendre l'élection du prochain président iranien, en prenant le risque de voir Ahmadinejad réélu...

Entre Américains et Iraniens, les contentieux sont lourds. L'Iran réclame, entre autres, le dégel de ses avoirs aux États-Unis, un compromis sur l'Irak, tout en s'opposant à un dialogue entre Washington et les talibans en Afghanistan. Et puis il y a le nucléaire, priorité de la communauté internationale. Grâce à la bombe, Téhéran veut sanctuariser son régime. La première de ses exigences sera que les États-Unis s'engagent à ne pas renverser la République islamique. Washington est-il prêt à lâcher cet atout d'entrée de jeu?

«Messages positifs»

L'histoire récente a montré qu'Américains et Iraniens savaient coopérer lorsque leurs intérêts convergeaient, comme

en Afghanistan, après la chute des talibans en 2001.

Les contacts officiels n'ont jamais été totalement rompus. Un proche du Guide révèle au Figaro avoir été «*approché*» par plusieurs responsables américains «*avant et après*» l'élection d'Obama. Parmi ceux-ci, le vice-président, Joe Biden, John Kerry et Anthony Lakes, l'ancien patron du Conseil national de sécurité. «*Ces messages positifs ont été transmis au Guide*», assure ce proche d'Ali Khamenei. Mais au final, le régime des mollahs peut-il survivre à une normalisation avec son ennemi? «*Si la société en rêve, le régime, lui, redoute d'être emporté avec cette ouverture*», conclut un diplomate.

G. M.



Face aux promesses de dialogue lancées par Obama, plusieurs écoles de pensée s'affrontent à Téhéran (de gauche à droite, l'ancien président Mohammad Khatami, l'ancien chef du Parlement Ali Akbar Nategh-Nouri et son successeur, Ali Larijani, le 2 décembre au Parlement). Kenare/AFP

Iraq agrees to resume oil sales to South Korean firm after it withdraws from Kurdish contracts

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN
Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Oil Ministry has agreed to resume oil sales to the South Korean company SK Energy after the company withdraws from a contract with the Kurds, an official said yesterday. The Oil Ministry suspended oil exports to South Korea's SK Energy and several other international firms to protest deals they had signed with the semiautonomous Kurdish government in northern Iraq.

But the decision will be reversed as South Korea's leading oil refiner has informed the Iraqi government that it plans to withdraw from the contract with the Kurds, head of the state oil marketing arm SOMO Falah Al Amiri said.

"The company officials have said that they will not be involved in any commitments apart from the federal government," Al Amiri said on the sidelines of a three-day energy conference that began on Friday in Baghdad.

"Oil shipments will be allocated for this company in the near future."

The Iraqi federal government suspended crude exports to South Korea's leading oil refiner in January on grounds that South Korean companies had not abandoned a deal signed in November with the Kurdish administration to develop a disputed oil field.

The Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq has signed more than 20 oil deals with foreign firms to work in Kurdish-controlled fields since it drafted its own oil and gas law in August last year.

The Shi'ite-led Iraqi central government says the deals are invalid with no national oil law in place.

SK Energy is part of a consortium led by the state-run Korea National Oil Corporation that signed a package of oil deals with Kurdish authorities last year.

Kurdish authorities played down concern

about the decision.

"The deal between this consortium with the Kurdish regional government is still valid and the withdrawal of one company is not a matter of concern to us," spokesman Falah Mustafa said.

The Kurds, whose territory sits on top of vast reserves, argue the Iraqi constitution gives them the right to unilaterally negotiate and sign oil deals, without consulting with the central government in Baghdad.

The Oil Ministry, however, considers those agreements illegal and has warned it will exclude and blacklist companies that sign deals with the Kurds.

The issue is one of several sticking points marring the relationship between the central government and the Kurds.

Iraq sits on the world's third-largest proven oil reserves with more than 115 billion barrels.

December 9, 2008

SPiegel

TURKEY'S FALTERING REFORM DRIVE *Erdogan Striking Nationalist Tones*

By Daniel Steinvorth in Istanbul

Amid corruption scandals and stagnating reform, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, praised in Europe as a modernizer, is seeking refuge in nationalist rhetoric, adopting a tougher stance on the Kurds and moving closer to the country's military leaders.

The public prosecutor in Adana, a city in southern Turkey, has clear ideas on how the state ought to treat teenagers who protest by throwing stones. In his view, they should be arrested and locked away, preferably for life.

Last week the prosecutor demanded up to 58 years in prison for six young Kurds between the ages of 13 and 16. During a demonstration in October, the students threw stones at police officers, shouted illegal slogans and unfurled posters touting the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

And because such teenagers, in his view, had to be the "children of terrorists," the provincial governor recommended punishing the families and cancelling their claims for pension and social benefits.

For months, trouble has been brewing once again in Turkey's Kurdish regions, and both sides are reacting in the customary way. Adolescents incited by the PKK are setting car tires on fire and committing acts of violence. In response, the military has brought in tanks and the courts are threatening the demonstrators with increasingly grotesque punishments.

Turkey, which is seeking entry to the Euro-



REUTERS

Turkey's Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, seen here chairing the annual meeting of the High Military Council in Ankara on December 2,

pean Union, is having trouble getting its most pressing problem under control. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who only six years ago was still making cocky promises to put an end to the frustrating, drawn-out conflict, and who in 2005 was his country's first prime minister to speak out about the Kurdish conflict, is as helpless today as his predecessor was.

Long praised in the West as a peacemaker and reformer, a man who has made great strides

in bringing his country closer to Europe, Erdogan is now revealing reactionary tendencies.

He has recently stopped calling for "cultural rights" for minorities, and is ignoring the human rights abuses being committed by Turkish police. Instead, he now prefers the language of the generals and nationalists. Turkey, Erdogan said excitedly in a recent speech to a Kurdish audience, is "one nation, one flag, one country." He added: "whoever doesn't like it can leave."

When Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat, the Kurdish-born deputy chairman of Erdogan's conservative Islamic party, the AKP, resigned from his position, the premier replaced him with a hardliner who prefers military force over dialogue when it comes to the Kurdish question.

Rapprochement With Military Leaders?

What is happening with Erdogan? Has the ambitious modernizer had a change of heart?

Has he lost his desire to drive his country toward the West? Or has the refined Islamist sought an alliance with the generals after all, after his party barely managed to escape a ban sought by the country's military leaders this summer?

Much points to a pact between the very different partners. Erdogan has been all too willing to support a campaign by military officers to curtail freedom of the press and opinion. In a dispute between the new Chief of the Turkish

General Staff, Ilker Basbug, and *Taraf*, a small daily newspaper, the increasingly autocratic Erdogan threw his support behind the commander.

Taraf, currently Turkey's most courageous newspaper, had published documents suggesting that the general staff had learned in advance of an attack by the PKK on a military outpost near the Iraqi border. Seventeen soldiers were killed there in the Oct. 4 attack, and it has been suggested that they may have been sacrificed in an effort to spark public outrage.

Anyone who publishes such reports, General Basbug said irately, is "partly responsible for the bloodshed." He threatened to shut down the newspaper. "Be careful," Erdogan said in a warning to the journalists, noting that the "public peace" is a greater good than the freedom of the press. In November, the prime minister himself took action against the press, ordering his press office to cancel the accreditation of seven journalists working for the Dogan media conglomerate.

Hard Line On Press

Erdogan had already recommended in September that the newspapers and television channels owned by Aydin Dogan, including such mass-circulation newspapers as *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet* and *Posta*, should be boycotted. By that point the premier and his adversary were already embroiled in a war of words. The powerful media czar had published detailed stories on the AKP's possible involvement in a scandal over political

contributions in faraway Germany.

A Frankfurt court had convicted members of Deniz Feneri, a religious charity, of embezzling donations from Germans of Turkish descent worth €18 million (\$23 million). The money, according to the prosecution, ended up in the "AKP environment." The extent of Erdogan's involvement in the case remains unclear, but his party's reputation is tarnished. Ironically, it was the AKP that has consistently prided itself, as an Islamist party, in being free of corruption and of having distanced itself from the sleaze of former administrations.

Erdogan, increasingly irritable and thin-skinned, appears to be running out of luck. Even the economy, previously the greatest plus in the AKP government's six-year tenure, is slowing down. For weeks, cabinet ministers and even President Abdullah Gül had led the world to believe that Turkey would remain largely untouched by the global financial crisis. No one should be alarmed, they said, because the country had gone through its own severe crisis in 2001 and, after that, had taken decisive steps to prevent it from happening again.

Economic Slowdown Could Hurt Prospects

But since then Ankara has entered into surprise negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for billions of euros in new loans. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are in jeopardy, experts warn. Once economic growth declines, the government can expect to lose some of its

support next year. Pollsters predict that the AKP will get only 34 percent of the vote in local elections in March, compared to 47 percent in the 2007 parliamentary election.

"They are being exposed in the current crisis, the so-called reformers," says Cengiz Aktar, a political scientist and well-known Erdogan critic, who accuses the government of incompetence and mediocrity. "In reality, the groundwork for most of the economic reforms was already laid before the AKP came into power." And political reforms, says Aktar, were only implemented between 2002 and 2004 -- in other words, until Turkey was granted candidate status for EU membership.

Since then, the only attempts at reform have favored devout wearers of the headscarf. This, says Aktar, is why he is not surprised by Erdogan's growing emphasis on nationalism and Islam. Instead, Aktar characterizes the changes taking place in Turkey as a "restoration" and, therefore, as a "normalization of Turkish conditions." There have always been marriages of convenience between the mosque and the barracks in Turkey. This, says Aktar, is why it is all the more important that Europe does not abandon the country now.

Aktar believes that unless Brussels applies pressure on Turkey to continue with reforms, Erdogan's chauvinistic tendencies will only increase. And then, he warns, "we will soon be dealing with a Turkish Bonaparte."

The
Economist

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Back to business in Iraq?

Some progress in Iraq, as a deal is struck on the export of oil to Turkey

The Iraqi government is turning its attention increasingly towards issues relating to economic development, now that an agreement of sorts has been hammered out on future security steps, notably the deal struck over a timetable for US withdrawal. Oil remains on top of the economic agenda, with efforts now being directed towards bridging the gap between the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the Baghdad authorities in their turf war about new field development. The government is also making moves in the telecoms sector, with new licences on the way, and addressing Iraq's chronic electricity shortages.

Turkish delight

The latest progress in the oil sector occurred in late November, when the KRG's prime minister, Nechiravan Barzani, and the federal oil minister, Hussein al-Shahrastani, agreed on the export of some 250,000 barrels/day of oil to Turkey from the northern Tawke and Taq Taq fields. These are operated under KRG-administered contracts respectively by Norway's DNO and a joint venture of Turkey's Genel Enerji and Switzerland-based Addax Petroleum. They are both to be connected to the main Kirkuk-Ceyhan northern export pipeline by mid-2009.

Development deals signed between the

KRG and international oil companies (IOCs) have thus far proved to be a source of considerable tension between the competing centres of power, with the central government deeming them illegal pending passage of a federal hydrocarbons law delineating federal and provincial rights over the industry and its monetary rewards. When prequalifying foreign companies for its first post-war international licensing round, finally launched to a shortlist of 40 firms in October, Baghdad threatened to bar IOCs from being party to such contracts.

Red herring

The federal law in turn has languished in draft form for more than 18 months owing to the ongoing power struggle between the central and regional governments. In this regard, the Tawke/Taq Taq agreement is a red herring since the concession contracts were entered before the KRG's introduction of a regional hydrocarbons law. Thus the provisions of the agreement and subsequent IOC deals signed under its terms are unacceptable to Baghdad. Nevertheless, the Turkish export deal suggests a more conciliatory approach from both sides—in the Kurds' case, through tacit acceptance of the need for federal blessing, and by implication, the more recent pacts' legally questionable status.

The softening stances are no doubt partly

motivated by the recent slump in global oil prices to one-third of their July peak of US\$147/b, which has highlighted the need to raise output capacity rather than relying on record accruals from existing production. "The government has to handle this [economic] crisis [of plummeting oil prices] as early as possible, not wait until its repercussions affect the lives of people, and reconstruction and development projects," said Iraq's president, Jalal al-Talabani. At the start of the month, budgeted expenditure for 2009 was reduced by 16% to US\$67bn from US\$80bn due to falling oil income—against estimated reconstruction spending needs running into hundreds of billions of dollars.

Telecoms discipline

A combination of the cash crunch and a greater sense of power and purpose have impelled the central government to take a firm line with international investors hoping to make quick and easy money from weak and desperate authorities. Aside from the oil sector—where the current licensing round, contrary to the "blood-for-oil" accusations levelled at the invaders, involves companies from across the world and is being carried out openly according to international norms—the telecoms sector also provides an illustrative example. The regulator, the National Communications &

Media Commission, and the communications ministry informed the three incumbent mobile licensees—Kuwait's Zain, Qatari-run Asiacell and Kurdish-owned Korek Telecom—in November that they were to face fines for failing to meet minimum conditions of coverage and service quality, while a request from all three for extended payment terms on the US\$1.25bn fees due for the 15-year licences, awarded in 2007, was rejected.

Meanwhile, the government plans to tender a fourth mobile licence in the new year. This will be done among pre-selected operators, to weed out cowboys from the start. The main

purpose will be to shake-up a market currently dominated by Zain, as well as to improve provision. The stance signals that Baghdad is no longer willing to allow firms simply to establish a foothold and await improved security and political stability before expanding services, as was the case especially in the telecoms and banking sectors in the early years after the invasion.

Security and economic reconstruction are intrinsically linked—a fact the government evidently realised through its prioritisation, under straitened circumstances, of investment in sectors with the most impact on daily lives.

The electricity minister Kareem Wahid said on December 1st that a US\$110m contract for the completion of Yousifiya power station near Baghdad had finally been signed with Russia's Technopromexport, while delayed deals worth some US\$7bn-10bn with the US's GE and Germany's Siemens to boost national capacity by more than 10,000 mw are due to be concluded by the end of December. Heavy investment in housing and transport infrastructure is also high on the agenda. The challenge will be for political and legislative progress first to catch up and then to maintain pace with economic demand.

TheNational

United Arab Emirate
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Iraqi oil dispute bubbles to the surface

Tamsin Carlisle

Prospects for settling a protracted Iraqi feud over regional oil development have once again receded, following an apparent breakthrough last month over negotiations to export crude from the country's autonomous Kurdistan region. Late last month, in a surprise visit to the north-eastern regional capital of Erbil, the Iraqi oil minister, Hussein al Shahrastani, agreed in principal to allow two recently discovered oilfields in Kurdistan to be connected to the state-owned pipeline that exports crude from northern Iraq to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.

That constituted a major concession that seemed to break a deadlock in oil discussions between Iraqi central authorities and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The snag is that Baghdad last week made clear that it still planned to treat Kurdistan crude developed with private-sector investment in the same way as oil from state-owned fields. Analysts said the decision left little room for the fields' developers – the Norwegian oil producer DNO International and a joint venture between the Swiss-Canadian company Addax Petroleum and Turkey's Genel Enerji – to be compensated for producing the oil, or even to have their costs reimbursed.

"The recent breakthrough in oil-export relations between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdish Regional Government again looks to be a chimera," said Samuel Ciszuk, the Middle East energy analyst for the consulting firm IHS Global Insight. After respectively discovering Kurdistan's Tawke and Taq Taq oilfields, DNO and the Addax/Genel venture have each installed about 50,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil production capacity. But with only a limited local market for crude, most of that capacity is idle due to the lack of export routes.

In Baghdad last week, Mr al Shahrastani said any oil produced in any part of Iraq would have to be handed over to the federal government for export. "The ministry of oil will export it. The revenues will go to the central budget for distribution inside the country," he said. The central government's proposal to pay the KRG a 17 per cent share of oil revenues before, rather than after, the oil developers are compensated would make all the difference to the projects' viability, as the regional government is bound by contracts allowing its foreign partners a 15 to 20 per cent share of oil production.

Mr Ciszuk said the proposal appeared to amount to an attempt by Mr al Shahrastani to persuade the KRG to abandon its production-sharing contracts in favour of being allowed to start exporting oil. "With future development dependent on other international oil companies investing, the attempt seems clumsy and unappealing." The curious one step forward, two steps back dance between the federal oil minister and the KRG nonetheless typifies the way Iraq's post-war efforts to revamp its battered oil industry have been unfolding in other areas.

Iraq's two upcoming licensing rounds for oilfields in the south of the country seem almost certain to face delays, as tight negotiation deadlines for the rounds are being upset by complex issues sur-



Iraq has put the squeeze on private investors by saying it will not give preferential treatment to Kurdistan crude. Nabil al Juran / AP Photo

rounding the government's failure to pass a federal oil law. So far, Iraq's oil ministry has been unable to provide even a model contract for major oil producers planning to participate in the first bidding round, leaving the companies with little time to prepare bids due in early April. Due to the complexity of negotiations between various government factions over the structure of oil contracts, the second bidding round could be delayed by several months until late next year, Iraqi officials suggested earlier this month at a conference in London.

Adding further uncertainty to Iraq's oil development outlook, the country's southern province of Basra – which holds Iraq's biggest oilfields, petroleum refineries and oil export terminal – is planning to hold a referendum on autonomy. "We believe that oil and gas belong to the Iraqi people, to all the Iraqi people," Wael Abdul Latif, an independent member of the Iraqi parliament and a former magistrate, told Agence France-Presse this week. "We are simply asking to be remunerated for the oil installations on our territory and to have a share of the profit of the oil exports which pass through our ports."

While a political showdown between Baghdad and Basra is not assured, its mere possibility raises the spectre of disruptions to about 1.5 million bpd of Iraqi crude exports through Gulf terminals.

Baghdad's existing dispute with the KRG, which is showing no sign of letting up, is already jeopardising the country's oil and gas exports through Turkey, in which major pipelines have recently become a favoured target for sabotage by Kurdish separatist militants.

Deals enabling Iraq's export lines to carry oil and gas produced in Kurdistan would reduce the incidence of such attacks, analysts predicted.

Maliki's tenure on ice as rift with Kurds widens

The Iraqi premier is increasingly at risk as cracks in his Shiite-Kurdish coalition grow in the waning days of the Bush administration, his other main ally.

By Jane Arraf | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

B AGHDAD AND SULAYMANIYAH, IRAQ Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's coalition of support is fraying. The Kurds, his chief Iraqi ally, are increasingly at odds with the Shiite premier over issues of power, oil, the military, and Kirkuk. Mr. Maliki's other main sponsor – the Bush administration – will also soon disappear.

While the growing Kurdish-Shiite rift may be the biggest threat yet to Maliki's tenure, what may ensure his survival are fears of the political battle that would follow his ouster and wreck many of the gains in Iraq's young democracy.

"In the absence of a good viable alternative that can be put in place quickly, the country cannot tolerate the chaos," says a senior Kurdish official.

But even though Maliki is likely to survive this increasingly bitter fight with the Kurds, he will not emerge unscathed.

"Kurds have made a judgment that he cannot be trusted and that's the worst part of this – it's not about the technicalities of oil law and this and that – this issue of trust was shattered," says the Kurdish official who, like all of the people interviewed for this story, would speak only on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

"A lot of the issues that are involved ... are characteristic of nation building and characteristic of competition for power and resources in nascent systems and that's what we are witnessing," says a senior US official. "I think relations obviously have deteriorated. What tangible impact that has on Maliki's ability to govern [is] hard to say but clearly this is problematic for him and for [the Kurds]."

Experts suggest that Iraq will weather many more of these internal power struggles as the US pulls back its military and political oversight in the years to come. They say the country could see pitched battles over resources, control over the military, and regional autonomy. The real challenge will be trying to contain the fights to parliament and keep them from spreading into fighting on the ground.

Ahead of provincial polls next month, the United Nations has cautioned that extremist violence could flare as rival parties jostle for power.

The current Kurd-Maliki rift is indeed volatile. A dispute over security at the parliamentary build-



ings recently shut down the buildings for two days, Iraqi officials say.

The buildings in Baghdad's Green Zone have been protected by Kurdish soldiers after Sunni and Shiite Arab parties failed to agree who should secure the premises. When Maliki tried to bring in more than his four allotted body guards last month, the detail was stopped by Kurdish soldiers, who were later ordered by Kurdish officials to temporarily withdraw their protection of the buildings. One of the key disputes between the Kurds and Maliki is over oil. The infighting has stalled already-delayed oil legislation that is eagerly awaited by foreign investors. So far many have been unwilling to invest in Iraq because of the uncertainty over the Iraqi oil law.

Iraq's cabinet passed a draft oil law more than a year ago but Kurdish officials withdrew their support saying it gave the central government too much control. After agreeing to allow Kurds to cut oil deals on their own in exchange for supporting the draft legislation, the Oil Ministry recently rescinded that offer.

The Kurds, as well as Sunni political factions, also want a more formal power-sharing deal with Maliki's ruling Shiite coalition, more participation in the Iraqi Army, and checks on Maliki's power,

which critics say has grown too much. And in the background of these Kurdish-Maliki feuds looms the issue of Kirkuk, the oil-rich city claimed by both Kurds and Arabs.

One of the main flash points has been the issue of tribal councils, which are government-financed groups that Maliki is setting up to facilitate reconciliation and fight insurgent activity. But the Kurds have protested the plan and say the move is really an effort for the central government to extend its control.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who also heads the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, said he would contest the legality of the councils in court. Maliki's Shiite partners in the coalition, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, also oppose the councils, which they say bypass local governments.

For his part, Maliki accuses the Kurds of contravening the Constitution by unilaterally deploying Kurdish soldiers outside of the country's semiautonomous Kurdish north.

"Things like who has the authority to tell regional forces where to go – that's part of the teething pains of institution building," says the US official.

Maliki has proved in the past that he can endure political attacks. Early last year he appeared to be teetering on the brink – with members of his coalition in open revolt. With a parliamentary deadlock holding up passage of the oil law and other legislation seen as key US goals, President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made clear they would not tolerate efforts to remove him, Iraqi officials say.

Officials say Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, personally went to bat for Maliki.

"The Kurds have sustained his government when the Sunnis walked out. The Kurds were instrumental in bringing the Sunnis back to the government, yet the minute they came back Maliki tried to reach a compromise with the Sunnis saying, 'Let's unite against the Kurds,'" says a Kurdish official.

"Last time last year it was Bush and Rice who saved him," says the official. "He has squandered the opportunities he had."

Basra in Iraq to decide on holding autonomy vote

By SAMEER N. YACOB (AP)

B AGHDAD â Iraq's election commission will run a petition drive to see if there's enough support for a referendum to decide whether the oil-rich province of Basra will become a self-ruled region, officials said Wednesday.

The Iraqi election commission said it would set up 34 centers across Basra where voters can sign the petition asking for a self-rule referendum. The drive begins on Monday and will last until Jan. 14, commission officials said.

Basra lawmaker Wail Abdul-Latif said that at least 10 percent of registered voters must sign the petition in order for a referendum to be scheduled.

If a majority voted in favor in the referendum, Basra would become a self-ruled region with the same powers as the Kurdish self-ruled area in the north.

That would give local authorities more control of the province's vast oil wealth.

The issue of self-rule in the heavily Shiite south has divided Iraqi politicians, including the Shiite coalition that has dominated political life in this country since the 2003 collapse of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-led regime.

The biggest Shiite party, the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, strongly supports Shiite autonomy in the south. But Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Dawa party opposes it, along with the movement of anti-U.S.

cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and Fadhila, a Shiite party with a strong base in Basra.

Self-rule is expected to become a major issue in regional elections, set for Jan. 31.

Al-Maliki has complained that guarantees of self-rule in the Iraqi constitution have weakened the central government. Those complaints have strained relations between the Shiite prime minister and his Kurdish allies, who have been part of the ruling coalition since 2005.

In a speech Wednesday in Karbala, al-Maliki alluded to the controversy, saying the country needed unity to ensure the security gains of the past year.

"If some people think that the country could be prosperous without the unity of its people, they are living in an illusion," al-Maliki said.

Also Wednesday, a Kurdish freelance journalist imprisoned in northern Iraq for writing a story about homosexuality was pardoned and released.

Adel Hussein said he was pardoned on Sunday by Massoud Barzani, the president of the self-ruled Kurdish region.

Hussein, a medical doctor, was sentenced Nov. 24 to six months in prison and ordered to pay a \$106 fine after he was convicted of violating a public decency law for an article he wrote about the physical effects of

homosexuality.

"I am a doctor and a specialist as well as a journalist. I was not supposed to be put in prison. It was too much to endure," Hussein told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Hussein was serving his sentence at Mahata prison in Irbil, about 220 miles north of Baghdad. He was among 121 people pardoned by the president in advance of the Muslim celebration of Eid al-Adha, according to Barzani's Web site.

"We are relieved that President Barzani intervened to right this injustice," Robert Mahoney, deputy director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, said in a written statement.

The case centers on an April 2007 article Hussein wrote for the independent weekly Hawlati.

Hussein's attorney, Luqman Malazadah, said the sentence handed down by the Kurdish court was based on an outdated 1969 Iraqi penal code.

A new law that took effect in October does not recognize a violation of "public custom," CPJ said.

Hussein, who is married with two children, said he wrote the article to educate readers, not to advocate homosexuality.

BBC NEWS 11 December 2008

Analysis: Kirkuk faultline



By Humphrey Hawksley
BBC News, Baghdad

The suicide bomb attack on an upmarket Kurdish restaurant near Kirkuk underscores the tension still wracking the ethnically mixed and oil-rich province in northern Iraq.

While violence in most of Iraq is down by up to 80%, Kirkuk remains restless.

It is the centre of northern Iraq's oil industry yet no workable agreement has yet emerged as to how the wealth should be shared.

The popular restaurant commanding stunning views from a hill top just north of Kirkuk was packed at the time of the attack.

Kurdish and Arab leaders, attempting to find some lasting reconciliation between the communities, were reportedly having lunch there at the time.

Some are among the casualties, together with women and children from families celebrating the Eid al-Adha festival.

Arabisation programme

Much of the political tension between the Kurds and Arabs stems from an Iraqi-government programme of the 1970s - under Saddam Hussein - that moved thousands of Arab families to the province and expelled Kurdish and other ethnic groupings from their homes.

Known as the "Arabisation of Kirkuk", the aim was to ensure Arab control of the oil fields that were first discovered in the 1920s and are connected by pipelines to Mediterranean ports.

It is this issue, together with historical grievances, that is still being played out today.

Iraqi Kurds believe they should control the city because of the demo-



graphic distortion caused by Saddam's Arabisation, and therefore retain much say over the oil.

But the ethnic Arabs, together with the Turkmen community, maintain the oil should be a national and not a regional resource. Therefore, they say, Kirkuk should remain outside the Kurdish semi-autonomous area and under control of the central government.

Referendum plan

There had been plans for a referendum on the issue, but steps to prepare for it have not yet materialised.

Arab families who had been moved there under Saddam Hussein were to go back to their original home areas, after which a census would be carried out and then a referendum.

While that remains pending, Kirkuk - together with the three Kurdish-controlled provinces - has been excluded from provincial elections due to be held in January.

During the years since the US-led invasion of Iraq the Kurdish provinces have been relatively peaceful.

But many Kurds believe Kirkuk is their historical capital, with ruins in the area dating back some 5,000 years.

In Iraq, where history and past grievances plays such a key and often violent part in political negotiations, Kirkuk remains a fault-line that will have to be dealt with substantively in the very near future.

With fragile reconciliation beginning in much of the country, the die-hard remnants of the suicide bombing insurgency are looking for new issues and targets for their violence.

Suicide attack kills 55 in Iraqi city of Kirkuk

Deadliest in 6 months; Kurds, Arabs meeting there

By Robert H. Reid, Associated Press

BAGHDAD - A suicide bomber killed at least 55 people yesterday in a packed restaurant near the northern city of Kirkuk where Kurdish officials and Arab tribal leaders were trying to reconcile their differences over control of the oil-rich region.

The brazen attack - the deadliest in Iraq in six months - occurred at a time of rising tension between Kurds and Arabs over oil, political power, and Kirkuk.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack at the upscale Abdullah restaurant, which was crowded with families celebrating the end of the four-day Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha. The United States blamed the blast on Al Qaeda, which uses suicide bombings as its signature attack.

Police Brigadier General Sarhad Qadir, who gave the casualty figures, said the dead included at least five women and three children. About 120 people were wounded.

It appeared, however, that the target was a reconciliation meeting among Arab tribal leaders and officials of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the Kurdish party of President Jalal Talabani, on ways to defuse tension among Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomen in the Kirkuk area.

Kurds want to annex Kirkuk and surrounding Tammim province into their self-ruled region of northern Iraq. Most Turkomen and Arabs want the province to remain under central government control, fearing the Kurds would discriminate against them.

Iraq's parliament exempted the Kirkuk area from next month's provincial elections because the different ethnic groups could not agree on how to share power.

A guard at the entrance said the blast occurred moments after a man parked his car and walked inside. He was not searched because the guards had not been told to frisk customers, the guard said. He spoke on condition of anonymity because of fears for his own safety.

At the city's main hospital, family members wept and screamed in the blood-smeared corridors as doctors tried to save lives. Many victims were horrifically wounded, and mangled bodies lay unattended on the emergency room floor.

"I do not know how a group like Al Qaeda claiming to be Islamic plans to attack and kill people on sacred days like Eid," said Awad al-



US soldiers inspected a restaurant after a suicide bomber blew himself up yesterday in Kirkuk, Iraq. Arab tribal leaders and Kurdish officials had gathered at the restaurant. (Emad Matti/Associated Press)

Jubouri, 53, one of the tribal leaders at the luncheon. "We were only meeting to discuss our problems with the Kurds and trying to impose peace among Muslims in Kirkuk."

The attack was the deadliest in Iraq since June 7, when a car bomb killed 63 people in a Shiite neighborhood of Baghdad.

US officials say attacks are down 80 percent nationwide since March, though major bombings still occur. A double truck bombing killed 17 people on Dec. 4 in the former Sunni insurgent stronghold of Fallujah west of Baghdad.

It was unclear what effect yesterday's attack would have on reconciliation efforts in Kirkuk, since the victims included both Arabs and Kurds. Mass attacks against civilians have prompted many Sunnis to turn against the insurgency.

But ethnic competition is intense in Kirkuk and elsewhere in the volatile north, the most ethnically mixed part of the country.

The UN mission, which has been trying to defuse tension in Kirkuk, urged community leaders "to demonstrate responsible leadership and to urge restraint by their followers at this

difficult time."

In a statement, US Ambassador Ryan Crocker and the top US commander General Ray Odierno condemned the bombing and accused Al Qaeda of trying to "divide Iraqi communities" and halt the progress toward "a stable, inclusive, and tolerant society."

US commanders have long believed that resolving differences among the ethnic communities is the key to defeating the insurgents in the north because Al Qaeda and the dozen other Sunni extremist groups there exploit those tensions.

But progress has been difficult because of deep-seated suspicions and conflicting claims on Kirkuk, the center of Iraq's vast northern oil fields which the Kurds have long wanted to bring into their autonomous region.

Kirkuk has been hit by at least 41 suicide attacks since May 2005, according to an Associated Press tally. The deadliest attack occurred July 17, 2007, when a suicide truck bomber struck a Kurdish political office, killing at least 80.



12 December 2008

Disputed Kirkuk a center of Kurds' struggle for power

Suicide bomber killed 55 at a restaurant in disputed Kirkuk city.

CNN

The Kirkuk region -- where police say a suicide bomber killed 55 at a restaurant on Thursday -- is a key battleground in a power struggle among Kurds and other elements in Arab-dominated Iraq.

Shiite Arab and Kurdish lawmakers vote together in parliament. But tensions between Kurds and other ethnic groups are longstanding, and are also developing between the Shiite-dominated central government and the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government.

The Kurds have been flexing their muscles lately by building up their substantial oil industry without conferring with the central government. They also want to incorporate towns with significant Kurdish populations outside the region into their sphere -- particularly the city of Kirkuk. But Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government has pushed back, criticizing some of the Kurdistan go-it-alone business efforts and criticizing the deployment of the Kurdish peshmerga security forces in towns under the control of the federal government.

The central government and the Kurdish region have been unable to reach a compromise on Kirkuk, a multi-ethnic city that the three-province Kurdish region sees as part of its historic homeland. That's not a position shared by its many resident Arabs, Turkmens, and Christians.

"A long-festering conflict over Kirkuk and other disputed territories is threatening to disrupt the current fragile relative peace in Iraq by blocking legislative progress and political accommodation," said an International Crisis Group report published in October.

The restaurant bombed on Thursday near Kirkuk was packed with families celebrating a Muslim holiday and included Kurdish and Arab politicians who went there after a political meeting. More than 100 people were injured; one of the Arab officials believes they were targeted.

Thousands of Kurds were ousted from Kirkuk by former President Saddam Hussein, who regarded Kurds as pro-Iran during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s.

Arabs moved in under Hussein's government, a policy called Arabization. But after Hussein was overthrown, Kurds returned to the region. Kurds, Arabs, Turkmens and others have been jockeying for power and over the city's fate for years. Iraq's Constitution called for a referendum on whether Kirkuk and its environs should be incorporated into the Kurdish region -- which consists of Duhok, Irbil, and Sulaimaniya provinces. Over the year, however, Kurdish lawmakers upset with the balance of power in Kirkuk have helped delay the vote to allow provincial elections next month.

Legislation for the January 31 polls eventually passed, but only 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces will vote. The vote was delayed in Kirkuk's Tameem province and in the three Kurdish region provinces because of the power-sharing disputes.

Other tensions reverberated this year. In August, al-Maliki sent troops to Khanaqin, a largely Kurdish town in Diyala province, under the guise of a security operation that turned out to be a move to oust peshmerga troops. There was a standoff between Iraqi soldiers and the peshmerga. Eventually, both sides compromised and decided that Iraqi police should have jurisdiction in the region.



Kirkuk's Abdullah restaurant lies in ruin after a suicide attack killed 55 as people ate a holiday meal.

The Kurds lately also are incensed about al-Maliki's decision to start tribal support councils in the Kurdish region and disputed territories. Those councils are pro-government groups similar to the predominately Sunni Arab Anbar awakening, or Sons of Iraq. The Kurds say they will be made up of Arabs who will compromise Kurdish power.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said "the short experience" Kurds have had with such councils is that they will "create enmity," and he said he wants to challenge forming these groups in court. One Kurdish politician, Aref Tayfur, said last month he fears the support councils "will spark sectarian and ethnic strife, and will lead to instability and a lack of security." But al-Maliki has disputed this, saying the councils aren't made up of militias and partisan groups. But he has criticized peshmerga activities in Khanaqin, saying the forces have mistreated civilians and have confronted troops in government-controlled areas.

He said last month the support councils are necessary "to maintain security and order in the provinces where we witnessed security chaos before the success of our armed forces to install security and stability." Differences between the Iraqi central government and the Kurds over oil has delayed national legislation on hydrocarbons and revenue sharing, and the International Crisis Group report says such legislation won't fly "without agreement on the disposition of disputed territories that boast major oil fields, such as Kirkuk."

The report, titled "Oil for Soil: Toward a Grand Bargain on Iraq and the Kurds," calls for a compromise. "In exchange for at least deferring their exclusive claim on Kirkuk for 10 years, the Kurds would obtain demarcation and security guarantees for their internal boundary with the rest of Iraq, as well as the right to manage and profit from their own mineral wealth.

"Such a deal would codify the significant gains the Kurds have made since they achieved limited autonomy in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War and especially after April 2003, while simultaneously respecting an Arab-Iraqi -- as well as neighboring states' -- red line regarding Kirkuk."



institute for war & peace reporting

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Kurds say Property Law Discriminatory

SYRIAN KURDS continue to voice concern about new legislation limiting rights to sell and rent out land in border areas, arguing that it amounts to discrimination against their community, and will harm the economic prospect in these parts of the country.

Decree No. 49, which President Bashar al-Assad signed into law in September, places tight restrictions on the ownership and use of land in areas near the country's borders with both Israel and Turkey.

The most controversial parts of the decree state that residents of border areas cannot sell real estate without obtaining prior permission from the authorities, specifically the interior, defence and agriculture ministries. Anyone who owns property must also get authorisation to rent or lease it out for a period of more than three years.

Radif Mustafa, a lawyer and chairman of the Kurdish Committee for Human Rights, said he believed the law directly targets Kurds, who make up the majority in areas bordering on Turkey.

"The al-Quneitra border is a special case because part of it is occupied by Israel, but why are the areas along the Turkish border included in the law, when Syrian-Turkish relations are now better than ever?" he asked.

"This is part of the discrimination practiced against the Kurds who populate those border areas."

More than 1.5 million Kurds live in northern regions of Syria bordering Turkey and Iraq.

Last month, nearly 200 Kurdish protesters were arrested after staging a protest in Damascus against the new rules. Hirfin Awsi, a public relations worker, was beaten with a metal baton before being taken away by police.

"We said nothing against the government or the president," she said. "Our protest was peaceful."

Luqman Oso, a member of the governing committee of Azadi, one of seven Kurdish parties that issued a statement in October condemning the property decree, said non-violent protests would continue.

"We succeeded in gathering a large number of Kurdish parties together, and we will continue our peaceful and democratic struggle until this decree is abolished," he said.

Khalaf al-Jarad, director general of Al-Wahda, a press group that publishes the leading state daily Al-Thawra, insists the law has been misinterpreted.

"I feel very sad and full of regret, and I am astonished how Decree no. 49, which deals with ownership, is being interpreted," he said in remarks quoted by the Quds Press news agency. "It is a regulatory decree that does not target a specific individual or group, but instead deals with matters of buying and selling. If some of our Kurdish brothers want to exaggerate this, they'll lose out because no one is going to believe the way they are interpreting the decree."

In border regions directly affected by the new rules, lawyer and activist Suleiman Ismail said there was considerable confusion about how to put them into practice.

"All legal actions involving property have ground to a halt because the judiciary cannot make any decision on these cases without instructions from the executive, and these have not been issued yet," he said. "We have no idea what the future of real estate in the province will be after this."

Those tasked with enforcing the decree can provide little useful information.

"We received the decree and we were required to implement it immediately, but we have received no instructions on how to do this," said an employee of the property registration office in al-Hiska. "We've simply been told to stop all registrations of ownership."

While confusion about enforcement continues, the economic repercussions are already being felt.

"We used to sell about 100 tons of iron per month, and now we're hardly sell ten tons – and that goes to government building contractors or to ongoing projects that started before this decree was issued," said Hussein Abbas, a civil engineer in al-Hiska. "Construction contractors are not buying iron or cement because no new licenses are being granted at the moment."

Mohammed Salih Salo, a building contractor from al-Qamishli, said uncertainty about the new law had left many afraid to buy and sell property.

"Construction work has stopped because people have suffered a loss of confidence," he said. "Previously, we could sell or buy real estate, pay the money and then get a license from the court. Now, people with money are not buying anything because property cannot be registered in their name in the government records, and that creates a problem of trust between sellers and buyers."

"We want to get the necessary licenses," he insisted. "We want to work, no matter what. But the government offices don't have any regulations relating to the new decree, so we're at a standstill."

The latest economic hardships have forced some Kurds to seek work elsewhere.

Mohammed al-Khatib, a carpenter by trade with a wife and two children to support, has come to the capital where he has found a job in a workshop.

"I have come to Damascus because the contractor we used to work with doesn't have a business any more," he said. "Most of the guys I'm working with are from al-Hiska province, and the majority are Kurdish. They want to earn a living any way they can, regardless of their occupation."

(Syria News Briefing, a weekly news analysis service, draws on information and opinion from a network of IWPR-trained Syrian journalists based in the country.)

TODAY'S ZAMAN

December 15, 2008

DTP delegation meets with Barzani in Iraq

TODAY'S ZAMAN

A delegation from the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) over the weekend had talks with Massoud Barzani, the head of the regional Kurdish administration in northern Iraq.

The meeting took place on Saturday at Barzani's residence in the resort town of Salahaddin in Arbil, the Web site of the Peyamner news agency, affiliated with Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), reported.

The DTP delegation, led by party leader Ahmet Türk, and Barzani "emphasized the need for resolution of problems in the region through dialogue," Peyamner said, without elaborating.

Türk was accompanied by the party's co-leader, Emine Ayna, İstanbul deputy Sabahat Tuncel, Siirt deputy Osman Özçelik and party council member Abdullah Demirbaş.

A DTP delegation led by Türk had paid a visit to the region in May 2008. Then, the delegation had talks with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Adnan al-Muftu, the chairman of northern Iraq's regional parliament, but was not able to meet Barzani as their request for an appointment with him was denied because of scheduling conflicts. The DTP currently faces a closure case in the Constitutional Court on charges of being "a focal point of terrorism."



Téhéran, une idée fixe pour les Israéliens

Le scénario du pire : préoccupés par l'éventualité d'un réchauffement des relations américano-iraniennes, les Israéliens pourraient être tentés d'effectuer une frappe préventive contre les installations nucléaires iraniennes.

OPEN DEMOCRACY (extraits)

Londres

La transition avant l'investiture de Barack Obama à Washington, le 20 janvier 2009, s'accompagne d'une nouvelle série de spéculations qui ravivent les inquiétudes sur les intentions d'Israël à l'égard de l'Iran. Deux informations récentes largement diffusées dans la presse israélienne rappellent la persistance du risque de conflit entre les deux Etats. La première souligne que Téhéran a procédé, le 12 novembre, à un nouveau test de missile balistique de moyenne portée capable d'atteindre des cibles dans toute la région. La seconde, parue le 26 novembre, reprend les déclarations de Téhéran selon lesquelles les Iraniens seraient en possession de 5 000 centrifugeuses d'enrichissement d'uranium.

On parle beaucoup des nouveaux missiles iraniens, tant en Israël qu'aux Etats-Unis. D'après Uzi Rubin, fondateur de l'Association israélienne de défense contre les missiles (IMDA), le nouveau missile iranien Sajeel-Ashura est bien plus avancé que tous les modèles précédents. Pour ajouter au malaise d'Israël, Ehoud Barak, le ministre de la Défense, a déclaré à la Knesset le 24 novembre que le Hezbollah [fidèle allié libanais de l'Iran] disposait de 42 000 missiles, soit trois fois plus que ce dont il disposait à l'époque de la guerre de juillet-août 2006. En outre, les stratèges militaires israéliens estiment que l'Iran pourrait rapidement abandonner ses ambitions nucléaires civiles actuelles. Certains analystes occidentaux – souvent proches du camp des faucons – affirment que le pays disposera bientôt de suffisamment d'uranium faiblement enrichi pour le faire passer en cascade dans ses centrifugeuses et l'enrichir dans le but d'obtenir suffisamment de matériau pour fabriquer une bombe atomique rudimentaire. Pour Israël, voir l'Iran se doter de l'arme nucléaire est en soi une idée intolérable.

De plus, cela risque de provoquer une prolifération des capacités nucléaires dans la région, en Arabie Saoudite, en Turquie, en Egypte, voire en Syrie. Cette évolution pourrait certes s'étendre sur une période de vingt à trente ans, mais, en termes de sécurité, cette échéance ne paraît pas si lointaine aux yeux des militaires israéliens.

On ignore si l'Iran possède véritablement la technologie lui permettant de produire une telle arme, et certains

ont affirmé que ses stocks de minerai d'uranium sont tellement contaminés de métaux lourds que la bombe qui en résulterait ne serait pas opérationnelle. Mais rien n'est sûr. De toute façon, il lui faudrait quand même des années pour produire un arsenal nucléaire à des fins militaires. Rien n'indique que l'Iran entende se lancer dans cette voie. Du point de vue israélien, en revanche, le fait que l'Iran soit en possession d'une arme nucléaire même "inefficace" représente un symbole politiquement lourd qui pèsera tant sur la politique intérieure israélienne que sur son statut de puissance militaire régionale. En un sens, aucune de ces évolutions à court terme n'a autant d'importance que l'inquiétude qui agite les militaires israéliens. Ceux-ci craignent que les Iraniens ne s'emploient à développer leur infrastructure nucléaire civile – en construisant de nouvelles centrales nucléaires (six sont prévues après Bushehr), des réacteurs destinés à la recherche et des usines d'enri-

■ Bonus-malus

"Barack Obama est prêt à offrir des avantages économiques à l'Iran en échange de l'arrêt de son programme nucléaire, 'inacceptable', et à menacer Téhéran de sanctions en cas de refus", explique le quotidien iranien Aftab-e Yazd. "Nous devons mettre en place une diplomatie directe mais ferme", a notamment déclaré le nouvel élu. Il a aussi dénoncé le soutien iranien au Hezbollah libanais et au Hamas palestinien.

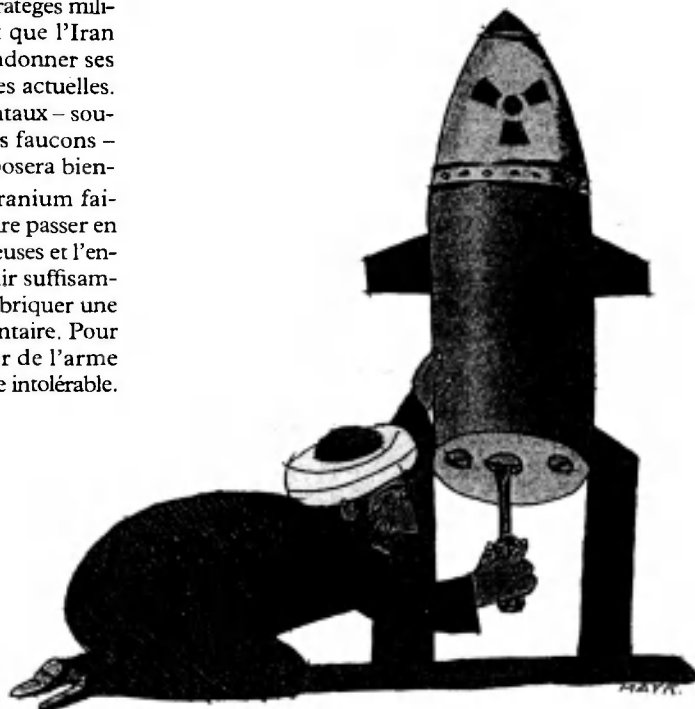
chissement – et d'acquérir, en définitive, un savoir-faire suffisant pour développer des armes nucléaires au moment qui leur semblera propice dans les dix ans à venir.

ISRAËL POURRAIT ENTRAÎNER LES ÉTATS-UNIS DANS LA GUERRE

Ce scénario du pire s'inscrit dans un contexte politique qui touche à la fois l'Iran et les Etats-Unis. Au cours des dernières années, le pouvoir s'est concentré à Téhéran entre les mains de l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, le vieux guide suprême. Malgré son discours populiste antisioniste, le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad n'est rien d'autre qu'un pantin, mais il préside un pays dont l'économie, en chute libre, combine une inflation galopante et une crise budgétaire qui s'est aggravée avec la chute des prix du pétrole. Le président de l'Iran doit faire face à une élection présidentielle en juin 2009, et il n'est pas du tout sûr que Khamenei le soutiendra. Ce dernier pourrait lui préférer un autre "jeune héros". Si Mahmoud Ahmadinejad n'est pas réélu et si l'administration Obama est prête à entamer le dialogue avec Khamenei, cela s'apparente à un scénario cauchemardesque aux yeux des militaires israéliens : un Hezbollah réarmé et une détente des relations américano-iraniennes, pendant que les Iraniens augmentent leur capacité de "faire tout péter" à court terme.

Tout cela ne suffirait pas à rendre imminente une attaque israélienne sur les installations nucléaires iraniennes, mais il faut prendre en compte deux autres considérations. La première, c'est que l'armée israélienne, malgré toute sa puissance supposée, a été tenue en échec par le Hezbollah durant la guerre de l'été 2006. En conséquence, elle désire reconquérir son statut de puissance militaire. La seconde, c'est qu'une attaque israélienne contre les installations nucléaires iraniennes n'aurait pas pour but de les détruire complètement, car les forces aériennes israéliennes ne sont tout simplement pas assez puissantes pour y parvenir ; il s'agirait plutôt de provoquer une réaction militaire iranienne contre Israël, mais aussi contre les forces américaines déployées dans la région, en particulier en Irak. Cela entraînerait les Etats-Unis dans la guerre, ce qui affaiblirait sérieusement les capacités militaires iraniennes, installations nucléaires comprises. **Paul Rogers***

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► Dessin de Mayk paru dans Sydsvenskan, Malmö.

ÉTATS-UNIS



Obama rattrapé par la réalité irakienne

Le nouveau président avait promis de "mettre fin à la guerre". Il insiste aujourd'hui sur le fait que des dizaines de milliers de soldats américains vont rester stationnés en Irak.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

New York

Pendant la campagne, Barack Obama avait fait une promesse qui avait galvanisé l'électorat de gauche, celle de "mettre fin à la guerre" en Irak. Mais, plus il se rapproche de la Maison-Blanche, plus le futur président rappelle que des dizaines de milliers de soldats américains resteront en Irak, même s'il procédera dans les seize mois, comme promis, au retrait de toutes les unités de combat américaines.

"J'ai dit que je retirerais toutes nos unités de combat d'ici à seize mois, tout en sachant qu'il sera peut-être nécessaire – et même plus que nécessaire – de maintenir une présence militaire résiduelle afin d'offrir une formation, un soutien logistique et de protéger nos civils en Irak", a déclaré Obama le 1^{er} décembre en présentant son équipe de sécurité nationale.

Pour l'instant, du moins pas en public, Obama n'a pas chiffré cette "présence militaire résiduelle". L'un de ses conseillers à la sécurité nationale, Richard Danzig, a cependant déclaré pendant la campagne qu'il pourrait s'agir de 30 000 à 55 000 hommes. Obama n'a pas non plus établi de calendrier de retrait de l'ensemble des troupes au-delà des seize mois évoqués, ni indiqué à quel moment il a l'intention de déclarer officiellement la fin de la guerre. Pendant ce temps, les stratèges du Pentagone planchent sur des échéanciers qui concilieraient à la fois l'objectif d'Obama de retirer l'ensemble des unités de combat américaines d'ici à mai 2010 et la date butoir du 31 décembre 2011, prévue par le nouvel accord entre les États-Unis et le gouvernement irakien pour renvoyer chez eux les derniers soldats américains. Cet accord sur le statut des forces américaines en Irak peut encore être modifié par un accord mutuel, et les responsables militaires reconnaissent en privé qu'ils travaillent sur des projets impliquant une présence américaine qui oscillerait entre 30 000 et 50 000 hommes, voire 70 000 – pour une période qui pourrait se prolonger au-delà de 2011.

Il y a toujours eu une tension, pour ne pas dire une contradiction, entre les



▲ Dessin de Kopelmitsky, États-Unis.

deux aspects de la promesse d'Obama de mettre fin à la guerre en retirant toutes les unités de combat américaines d'ici mai 2010. Certes, Obama a toujours été prudent et a souligné que le retrait promis ne concernait que les unités de combat. Mais nul ne tiendra rigueur à ses partisans s'ils ont cru que l'expression "mettre fin à la guerre" signifiait que tous les soldats américains allaient rentrer chez eux.

"MA PRIORITÉ EST DE VEILLER À LA SÉCURITÉ DE NOS TROUPES"

Selon les stratèges du Pentagone, l'objectif de Barack Obama pourrait être atteint au moins en partie en réaffectant certaines unités de combat à des missions de soutien aux Irakiens. On dénombre aujourd'hui en Irak quinze brigades de combat [chaque brigade compte 3 000 hommes], dont une est actuellement rapatriée. Mais, au total, plus de 146 000 soldats américains, intendance comprise, sont déployés, soit l'équivalent d'une cinquantaine de brigades. Aujourd'hui, même après le départ des cinq brigades envoyées en renfort par le président Bush en janvier 2006, le nombre total de soldats américains sur le territoire irakien reste supérieur à son niveau précédent en raison de la présence du personnel d'intendance.

Lors de sa conférence de presse du 1^{er} décembre à Chicago, Obama s'est dit prêt à écouter attentivement les conseils des hauts gradés et de sa nou-

velle équipe pour la sécurité nationale, dans laquelle figurent l'actuel ministre de la Défense, Robert Gates (premier chef du Pentagone à demeurer en poste après un changement de présidence), l'amiral Michael Mullen, chef d'état-major interarmes, et le général James Jones, ancien commandant de l'OTAN nommé par Obama conseiller à la sécurité nationale.

Au Pentagone et dans les quartiers généraux américains en Irak, les réactions ont ressemblé à un vaste soupir de soulagement, car le président élu paraît vouloir aborder de façon mesurée la question du nombre de soldats.

"Je pense que seize mois suffisent, mais, ainsi que je l'ai répété, j'écouterai les recommandations de mes généraux", a déclaré Barack Obama lors de cette conférence de presse. "Et ma priorité est de veiller à ce que nos troupes restent en sécurité pendant cette phase de transition et que le peuple irakien soit correctement servi par un gouvernement auquel seront transférées de plus en plus de missions de sécurité." On ne peut que constater que le discours du président a quelque peu évolué depuis sa conférence de presse de juillet dernier, dans laquelle il avait exposé sans ambiguïté son projet pour l'Irak. "Je veux mettre fin à cette guerre", avait-il alors déclaré. "Au premier jour de ma présidence, je convoquerai l'état-major interarmes et je lui assignerai une nouvelle mission : mettre un terme à cette guerre de manière responsable, posée et déterminée."

Thom Shanker



A DIYALA, L'AMBITION DES TRIBUS ARABES CONTRECARENT LES PROJETS KURDES

AL-MOUQDADIYAH (Irak), 11 déc 2008 (AFP) -

L'AMBITION des chefs tribaux arabes, qui ont mis fin cette année à leur guerre fratricide à al-Mouqdadiah dans l'est de l'Irak, suscite l'inquiétude de leurs voisins kurdes qui espèrent rattacher une partie de la province de Diyala au Kurdistan.

"Nos tribus existent depuis des décennies", a affirmé à l'AFP Saadouné al-Joubouri, lors d'une récente réunion de six chefs chiites et sunnites à al-Mouqdadiah, une ville de 250.000 habitants à 100 km au nord-est de Bagdad.

En janvier 2008, ils avaient créé le premier des 14 "comités de soutien" de Diyala, rassemblements tribaux chargés de purger des éléments extrémistes la province considérée comme l'une des plus dangereuses d'Irak.

Les toutes premières milices tribales du genre, les Sahwa ("Réveil" en arabe), s'étaient constituées en septembre 2006 dans la région occidentale d'Al-Anbar pour mettre en pièces Al-Qaïda avec l'aide des forces américaines.

Cette expérience s'était étendue à la province sunnite de Salaheddine (nord de Bagdad) et aux quartiers de la capitale aux mains des jihadistes.

Mais ces regroupements tribaux ne sont qu'une extension du pouvoir central, estiment les Kurdes qui convoitent l'est de Diyala.

Ces derniers sont tous près, à 60 km de Mouqdadiah, au bout d'une route entrecoupée de points de contrôle militaires, dans la ville de Khanaqine.

Cette cité de 180.000 kurdes chiites, près de la frontière iranienne, est gardée par les peshmergas (combattants kurdes), descendus du nord après la chute de Saddam Hussein et qui l'ont préservée de la violence.

Elle fait partie des douze "territoires disputés" dans le nord de l'Irak, à la suite de mouvements de population ordonnés par l'ancien dictateur dans le cadre de sa politique "d'arabisation".

Pour son maire, Mohammad Mollah Hassan, ces rassemblements tribaux près de sa ville sont une tentative de Bagdad de contrecarrer ses projets.

"Ces groupes armés suscitent des tensions ethniques et confessionnelles. Ils

ne sont mus que par l'argent", assure-t-il, ajoutant perfidement que ces tribus arabes qui aujourd'hui combattent le terrorisme étaient il y a peu liées aux jihadistes.

Pour les Kurdes, ces comités sont "illégaux". Et ils ont menacé de se pourvoir devant la Cour Constitutionnelle.

De son côté, le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki les considère comme politiquement indépendants et indispensables à la sécurité.

Les cheikhs d'al-Mouqdadiah déclarent encaisser de l'Etat 8.500 dollars par mois pour couvrir les frais de fonctionnement, mais jurent n'avoir obtenu aucune arme.

Ils sont cependant liés aux Sahwa.

S'ils déclarent ne pas être loyaux à la personne du Premier ministre mais à l'Etat, ni vouloir jouer un rôle dans les élections provinciales du 31 janvier, ils s'inscrivent dans la stratégie de M. Maliki qui courtise les tribus.

Nouri al-Maliki "essaie de créer une dynamique autour de sa personne. Pour cela, il glorifie le rôle des tribus dans la défense du pays (...) et vis-à-vis des Arabes, il assure qu'il ne laissera pas les Kurdes obtenir plus que ce à quoi ils ont droit", explique le chercheur Hosham Dawod, spécialiste des tribus.

Pour le cheikh Khaled al-Joubouri, un parent de Saadouné, les Kurdes "veulent un pays faible pour imposer leur volonté".

"Ils ne désirent pas voir les tribus unies. Quant aux régions disputées, ce sont toutes des terres tribales arabes", dit-il.

Le cheikh Abdelmoneim al-Tamimi, chef tribal chiite qui siège au côté de son pair sunnite Saadouné al-Joubouri, présente leur "comité" comme un modèle de réconciliation politique.

Mais les Kurdes craignent que, comme par le passé, les chefs tribaux contrôlent les campagnes pour le compte du pouvoir central.

"Le gouvernement ne doit pas revenir en arrière. Le temps des chefs tribaux est clos, nous vivons dans une période moderne", assure Mohammad Mollah Hassan



13 décembre 2008

Irak: des militaires américains resteront dans les villes après juin

BALAD (AFP) — Le commandant des forces de la coalition en Irak, le général Raymond Odierno, a confirmé samedi que des militaires américains resteraient après juin 2009 dans les villes et villages du pays pour conseiller et entraîner l'armée irakienne.

Le général Odierno a rencontré le secrétaire américain à la Défense, Robert Gates, qui a effectué une brève visite surprise en Irak après avoir appelé les voisins de l'Iran à faire pression sur Téhéran pour l'amener à changer de politique.

M. Gates a également mis en garde les adversaires des Etats-Unis contre toute tentation de tester le président élu Barack Obama, lors d'une conférence à Manama, au Bahreïn.

En Irak, la visite s'est déroulée sur la base Anaconda de Balad (70 km au nord de Bagdad).

Conformément à l'accord de sécurité signé entre Bagdad et Washington, les unités de combat de l'armée américaine auront quitté d'ici le 30 juin prochain les villes et villages du pays.

Mais "nous continuerons à apporter notre assistance aux équipes de transition. Nous continuerons à fournir des conseillers aux forces (irakiennes, ndr) de sécurité", a précisé le général Odierno à des journalistes.

"Il est important que nous maintenions suffisamment de présence ici pour les (les Irakiens, ndr) aider à passer cette année de transition", a expliqué le général Odierno, rappelant que les

Irakiens se rendraient trois fois aux urnes en 2009, pour des élections provinciales et législatives, et pour un référendum sur l'accord de sécurité signé



le mois dernier avec les Etats-Unis.

Il n'a pas précisé combien de militaires américains resteraient dans les villes sur des "postes de sécurité conjoints" avec les soldats irakiens.

Interrogée, l'armée américaine n'a pas été en mesure de préciser combien de soldats, parmi les 146.000 déployés actuellement en Irak, appartiennent à des unités de combat.

Le général Odierno a par ailleurs émis l'idée que des unités de combat restent, si nécessaire, dans certaines zones très sensibles d'Irak après juin 2009, comme par exemple à Mossoul, le

"dernier bastion urbain d'Al-Qaïda".

"Il y a encore des problèmes à Mossoul que nous devons résoudre", a dit M. Odierno.

Mossoul et ses plus de 1,5 million d'habitants sunnites, chiites, chrétiens et kurdes, est considérée par le commandement américain comme l'épicentre de l'action des partisans en Irak d'Oussama ben Laden, repoussés en 2007 de Bagdad et de l'ouest du pays.

Irakiens et Américains y mènent depuis mai une offensive mais Mossoul reste, avec la province de Diyala, l'un des endroits les plus dangereux d'Irak.

Plus tôt, le secrétaire américain à la Défense s'est exprimé à Manama dans le cadre d'une conférence sur la sécurité dans le Golfe à laquelle participent 25 pays. Une délégation iranienne était attendue mais n'est finalement pas venue, selon les organisateurs.

"Personne ne veut un changement de régime en Iran", a affirmé M. Gates.

"Ce que nous voulons c'est un changement de politique et un changement de comportement afin que l'Iran devienne un bon voisin des peuples de la région plutôt qu'une source d'instabilité et de violence", a-t-il ajouté.

Robert Gates, maintenu dans ses fonctions par Barack Obama, a souligné qu'il "restait à voir" si la nouvelle administration américaine assouplirait les conditions d'une diplomatie directe avec l'Iran.

"Mais il y a une chose que je peux dire avec confiance, c'est que le président élu n'a aucune illusion sur le comportement de l'Iran et sur ce que fait ce pays en ce qui concerne son programme

d'armement".

Il a évoqué les défis posés à la future administration.

"Quiconque penserait que les mois à venir pourraient offrir l'occasion de mettre à l'épreuve la nouvelle administration aurait gravement tort", a prévenu Robert Gates.



SEPT MEMBRES D'UNE FAMILLE DE YAZIDIS TUÉS DANS LE NORD DE L'IRAK

MOSSOUL (Irak), 15 déc 2008 (AFP) -

SEPT MEMBRES d'une même famille appartenant à la secte kurdophone des yazidis ont été assassinés dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi dans le nord de l'Irak, a indiqué la police.

"Un groupe d'hommes armés est entré durant la nuit dans une maison à Sinjar et ont tiré sur une famille yazidie, tuant trois femmes et quatre hommes", a affirmé Nachawan Mohamed, un officier de police de cette ville de 240.000 habitants située à 500 km au nord-ouest de Bagdad, près de la frontière syrienne.

La communauté yazidie, estimée à près de 300.000 personnes, est une minorité kurdophone installée dans le nord de l'Irak. Elle considère le diable comme le chef des anges et le représente par le paon.

Elle a été la principale victime de l'attentat le plus meurtrier en Irak depuis l'invasion américaine de 2003: le 14 août 2007, plus de 400 personnes avaient été tuées dans des attaques au camion piégé, dans les villages d'Al-Khataniyah et d'Al-Adnaniyah, essentiellement peuplés par des Yazidis, dans la province de Ninive.

Ces attentats, imputés par l'armée américaine à la branche irakienne de

l'organisation Al-Qaïda, avaient massacré des familles entières de la minorité. Après 2003, la secte avait pourtant tenté de demeurer à distance des conflits interconfessionnels et politiques ensanglantant l'Irak. Mais ses relations avaient fini par se tendre gravement avec les communautés sunnites voisines.

Persécutés pendant des siècles, leur droit à pratiquer leur culte est reconnu dans la nouvelle constitution irakienne. La communauté yazidie dispose de trois députés, sur les 275 sièges à l'Assemblée nationale, élus sur la liste kurde, et de deux sièges sur 111 au Parlement autonome kurde.

Outre l'Irak, ses fidèles sont dispersés en Allemagne, en Grande-Bretagne, en Turquie, en Russie et en Syrie.

Cette secte, dont les membres ne peuvent pas se convertir à d'autres religions, est divisée en six classes: les princes, les cheikhs, les sénateurs, les prédicateurs, les ascètes et enfin les fidèles, qui représentent 70% de la communauté. Les mariages entre castes sont interdits.

Sa plus grande fête annuelle est un pèlerinage de sept jours sur la tombe de la figure centrale de la secte, cheikh Adi, au temple de Lalish, à une soixantaine de kilomètres de Mossoul, un des bastions de la rébellion sunnite dans le nord de l'Irak.



TURCS ET IRANIENS BOMBARDENT LE NORD DE L'IRAK

ERBIL (Irak), 17 déc 2008 (AFP) -

L'AVIATION turque et les artilleurs iraniens ont bombardé mercredi la région frontalière septentrionale de l'Irak, a indiqué à l'AFP le porte-parole des peshmergas (combattants) du Kurdistan irakien Jabbar Yawar.

"Les forces turques et iraniennes continuent de bombarder la région frontalière irakienne sous le prétexte de combattre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatistes kurdes de Turquie) dans les régions de Hadj Omrane et les Monts de Qandil", dans le nord-est de l'Irak, a-t-il dit.

"Ces bombardements turcs et iraniens ont fait beaucoup de dommages matériels dans ces villages et les habitants se sont enfuis", a-t-il ajouté.

A Ankara, l'armée turque a annoncé avoir bombardé pour la deuxième journée consécutive des cibles du PKK, dans le nord de l'Irak. Il s'agit de positions dans les montagnes de Qandil, place-forte des rebelles kurdes de Turquie, selon un communiqué publié sur le site internet de l'armée turque.

"Les avions ont accompli avec succès leur mission et sont retournés sans problèmes à leurs bases", ajoute-t-il.

Mardi, l'armée turque avait indiqué avoir frappé des positions dans cette même zone.

L'armée turque effectue régulièrement des raids aériens contre des bases du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, avec l'aide de renseignements fournis par les Etats-Unis. Le précédent raid avait eu lieu le 5 décembre.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, mène depuis 1984 une campagne armée pour obtenir l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, région peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait 44.000 morts.

Ankara affirme que quelque 2.000 rebelles du PKK sont retranchés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak et accuse souvent les Kurdes d'Irak, qui gèrent la région autonome, de tolérer et même d'aider les activités du PKK.

Le mois dernier, l'Irak, la Turquie et les Etats-Unis ont décidé de former une commission conjointe pour adopter des mesures de nature à faire cesser les activités des rebelles kurdes.

"Nous attendons que ce comité commence à travailler effectivement dans un très court délai", a indiqué mercredi le porte-parole du ministère turc des Affaires étrangères Burak Özügergin. Il a aussi annoncé une prochaine visite à Ankara du ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères, Hoshyar Zebari.

L'Irak, autre voisin de l'Irak, mène lui aussi des raids réguliers contre des positions de rebelles kurdes en Irak.

Des localités du Kurdistan irakien, frontalières de l'Iran, sont régulièrement la cible de tirs d'artillerie de l'armée iranienne qui tente d'éradiquer la rébellion kurde.

Le groupe séparatiste du Péjak, lié au PKK, est accusé par Téhéran de mener des opérations armées dans l'ouest de l'Iran et d'être soutenu par Washington.



ANKARA ET BAGDAD PEUVENT COOPÉRER SUR LE PROBLÈME KURDE (DIRIGEANT IRAKIEN)

ANKARA, 20 déc 2008 (AFP) -

LE VICE-président irakien Tarek al-Hachemi a souhaité samedi qu'Ankara et Bagdad travaillent ensemble pour régler le problème de la rébellion kurde dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anadolu.

De récentes initiatives pour régler le problème en commun permettront de "mettre fin aux activités de l'organisation terroriste PKK de part et d'autre de la frontière et d'améliorer les relations bilatérales", a dit M. al-Hachemi cité par

Anadolu.

Des centaines de militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatistes kurdes de Turquie), considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, sont réfugiés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak d'où ils lancent des attaques contre la Turquie.

La Turquie a accusé à diverses reprises les Kurdes irakiens, qui dirigent une

administration autonome dans la région, de tolérer et même d'aider le PKK tout en affirmant vouloir poursuivre le dialogue avec eux.

Les Kurdes irakiens sont prêts à apporter leur aide contre le PKK, a expliqué M. al-Hachemi, selon l'agence Anatolie, en ajoutant que le président irakien Jalal Talabani qui est Kurde, lui avait demandé de transmettre "un message

fort" à Ankara selon lequel "les Kurdes irakiens sont ouverts à une amélioration des relations" avec la Turquie.

Le PKK a lancé en 1984 une campagne armée pour obtenir l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, une région peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait 44.000 morts.

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**TRIBUNE
DE GENEVE**

21 décembre 2008

une chaîne entièrement en kurde à la télévision d'état turque le 1er janvier

ANKARA (AFP)

La Turquie franchira une nouvelle étape dans l'ouverture vers sa communauté kurde à partir du 1er janvier 2009 avec le lancement sur une chaîne de télévision publique d'émissions en kurde, une langue autrefois interdite.

Cette chaîne, baptisée la Six car elle est la sixième chaîne de télévision généraliste de l'établissement public de radio et télévision turque (TRT), émettra 24h sur 24 en langue kurde.

Selon le directeur général de la TRT, Ibrahim Sahin, cette chaîne cherchera à "ne pas imposer l'idéologie de l'Etat" et proposera des programmes d'information de plusieurs heures.

La chaîne, dont les préparatifs se poursuivent dans la discrétion, sera dirigée par un diplomate et commencera par émettre en kurmanci, dialecte kurde majoritaire en Turquie.

Le projet est ambitieux car la chaîne doit trouver sa place parmi la dizaine de chaînes kurdes diffusées en Turquie par satellite et suivies par des millions de personnes grâce à des antennes paraboliques disséminées dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé majoritairement de kurdes.

Et avant même son lancement, la chaîne a subi un premier revers: deux chanteurs kurdes, Ciwan Haco et Sivan Perver, auraient refusé de faire des émissions pour la chaîne, selon la presse.

Les enregistrements de ces artistes comme ceux de tant d'autres s'échangeaient

sous le manteau dans les années 1980 et 1990, lorsque la rébellion du Parti des travail-



leurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste) battait son plein contre le pouvoir d'Ankara.

Mais depuis le début des années 2000, pour renforcer ses chances d'adhésion à l'Union européenne, la Turquie a brisé des tabous: en 2004 des programmes hebdomadaire de 30 minutes en langue kurde ont été lancés sur la TRT puis sur les chaînes privées dans un pays où il y a encore 15 ans l'usage du kurde en public était interdit.

Initiative remarquable à l'époque mais jugée insuffisante par les milieux kurdes qui ont dénoncé le contenu des programmes, dédiés à la culture générale sans jamais toucher aux sujets sensibles.

Selon les autorités turques, cette nouvelle chaîne pourrait contribuer à limiter l'influence de Roj-TV, la chaîne pro-PKK qui émet du Danemark malgré les protestations d'Ankara.

Ainsi, un projet de loi a été élaboré cette année par le gouvernement du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et approuvé en été par le Parlement puis le chef de l'Etat.

Le problème kurde en Turquie sera-t-il pour autant résolu?

"Non", estime sèchement le député kurde Sirri Sakik qui juge cette démarche "cosmétique" avant des élections municipales en mars que M. Erdogan veut à tout prix remporter dans les provinces kurdes.

"Il n'y aura pas de débat politique sur cette chaîne. Le gouvernement envisage de s'en servir pour de la propagande", a indiqué à l'AFP ce parlementaire membre du Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), la principale formation pro-kurde du pays, menacé d'interdiction pour collusion avec le PKK.

M. Sakik accuse M. Erdogan, au pouvoir depuis 2002, de n'avoir "rien fait pour résoudre le problème kurde" et rappelle ses slogans de plus en plus nationalistes ces derniers temps.

"Nous disons: une nation, un drapeau, une patrie et un Etat. Ceux qui ne sont pas d'accord avec ça devraient partir", avait lancé le Premier ministre en novembre.

Le sud-est anatolien, théâtre depuis 1984 d'affrontements entre les forces turques et le PKK, est la région la plus pauvre de Turquie avec un fort taux de chômage chez les jeunes. Les combats ont laissé des séquelles dans cette zone avec de nombreux cas de violations des droits de l'Homme.

AFP

LE PKK ACCUSE LA TURQUIE DE SUSCITER DES DISSENSIONS ENTRE LES KURDES

ERBIL (Irak), 21 déc 2008 (AFP) -

UN HAUT responsable des séparatistes kurdes a accusé dimanche la Turquie de chercher à susciter des conflits au sein de cette ethnie en se rapprochant du gouvernement autonome kurde irakien.

"Depuis l'échec de leur opération militaire l'an dernier à la frontière entre l'Irak et la Turquie, ils ont opté pour une politique de division des Kurdes pour créer des conflits entre eux", a déclaré à l'AFP Kamal Kheyri, responsable des relations extérieures du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatistes kurdes de Turquie) joint par téléphone.

Les Kurdes sont partagés entre l'Irak, la Turquie, l'Iran et la Syrie.

"Dans ce but, les Turcs se rapprochent du gouvernement de la région du Kurdistan irakien", a ajouté le responsable du PKK, pressant les responsables kurdes irakiens "de ne pas tomber dans le piège du complot turc".

"Les kurdes sont chanceux car jusqu'à présent nos ennemis n'ont pas réussi à

provoquer une guerre intestine", s'est félicité M. Kheyri.

Des centaines de militants du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, sont réfugiés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak d'où ils lancent des attaques contre la Turquie.

La Turquie a accusé à diverses reprises les Kurdes irakiens, qui dirigent une administration autonome dans la région, de tolérer et même d'aider le PKK tout en affirmant vouloir poursuivre le dialogue avec eux.

Les Kurdes irakiens sont prêts à apporter leur aide contre le PKK, a expliqué samedi à Ankara le vice-président irakien Tarek al-Hachemi en ajoutant que le président irakien Jalal Talabani qui est Kurde, lui avait demandé de transmettre "un message fort" à Ankara selon lequel "les Kurdes irakiens sont ouverts à une amélioration des relations" avec la Turquie.

U.S. details failures in rebuilding Iraq

Official account depicts effort as a \$100 billion disaster

By James Glanz and T. Christian Miller

BAGHDAD: An unpublished, 513-page federal history of the U.S.-led reconstruction of Iraq depicts an effort crippled before the invasion by Pentagon planners who were hostile to the idea of rebuilding a foreign country, and then molded into a \$100 billion failure by bureaucratic turf wars, spiraling violence and ignorance of the basic elements of Iraqi society and infrastructure.

"Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience," the first official account of its kind, is circulating in draft form here and in Washington among a tight circle of technical reviewers, policy experts and senior offi-

cial. It also concludes that when the reconstruction began to lag — particularly in the critical area of rebuilding the Iraqi police and army — the Pentagon simply put out inflated measures of progress to cover up the failures.

In one passage, for example, former Secretary of State Colin Powell is quoted as saying that in the months after the 2003 invasion, the Defense Department "kept inventing numbers of Iraqi security forces — the number would jump 20,000 a week! 'We now have 80,000, we now have 100,000, we now have 120,000.'"

Powell's assertion that the Pentagon inflated the number of competent Iraqi security forces is backed up by Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the former commander of ground troops in Iraq, and L. Paul Bremer 3rd, the top civilian administrator until an Iraqi government took over in June 2004.

Among the overarching conclusions of the history is that five years after embarking on its largest foreign reconstruction project since the Marshall

Plan in Europe after World War II, the U.S. government has in place neither the policies and technical capacity nor the organizational structure that would be needed to undertake such a program on anything approaching this scale.

The bitterest message of all for the reconstruction program may be the way the history ends. The hard figures on basic services and industrial production compiled for the report reveal that for all the money spent and promises made, the rebuilding effort never did much more than restore what was destroyed during the invasion and the convulsive looting that followed.

By mid-2008, the history says, \$117 billion had been spent on the reconstruction of Iraq, including \$50 billion in U.S. taxpayer money.

The history contains a catalogue of revelations that show the chaotic and often poisonous atmosphere prevailing in the reconstruction effort.

■ When the Office of Management and Budget balked at the U.S. occupation authority's abrupt request for about \$20 billion in new reconstruction money in August 2003, a veteran Republican lobbyist working for the authority made a bluntly partisan appeal to Joshua Bolten, then the Office of Management and Budget director and now the White House chief of staff. "To delay getting our funds would be a political disaster for the President," wrote the lobbyist, Tom Korologos. "His election will hang for a large part on show of progress in Iraq and without the funding this year, progress will grind to a halt." With administration



Saul Loeb/Agence France-Presse

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki trying to protect President George W. Bush after an Iraqi man threw shoes during a press conference.

backing, Congress allocated the money later that year.

■ In an illustration of the hasty and haphazard planning, a civilian official at the U.S. Agency for International Development was at one point given four hours to determine how many miles of Iraqi roads would need to be reopened and repaired. The official searched through the agency's reference library, and his estimate went directly into a master plan. Whatever the quality of the agency's plan, it eventually began running what amounted to a parallel reconstruction effort in the provinces that had little relation with the rest of the U.S. effort.

■ Money for many of the local construction projects still under way is divided up by a spoils system controlled by neighborhood politicians and tribal chiefs. "Our district council chairman has become the Tony Soprano of Rasheed, in terms of controlling resources," said a U.S. Embassy official working in a dangerous Baghdad neighborhood, referring to the popular TV mob boss. "You will use my contractor or the work will not get done."

The United States could soon have reason to consult this cautionary tale of deception, waste and poor planning, as both troop levels and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan are likely to be stepped up under the new administration.

The incoming Obama administration's rebuilding experts are expected to focus on smaller-scale projects and emphasize political and economic reform. Still, such programs do not address one of the history's main contentions: that the reconstruction effort has failed because no single agency in the U.S. government has responsibility for the job.

Five years after the invasion of Iraq, the history concludes, "the government as a whole has never developed a legislatively sanctioned doctrine or framework for planning, preparing and executing contingency operations in which diplomacy, development and military action all figure."

"Hard Lessons" was compiled by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, led by Stuart Bowen Jr., a Republican lawyer who regularly travels to Iraq and has a staff of

engineers and auditors based here. Copies of several drafts of the history were provided to reporters at The New York Times and the nonprofit investigative Web site ProPublica by two people outside the inspector general's office who have read the draft but are not authorized to comment publicly.

Bowen's deputy, Ginger Cruz, declined to comment for publication on the substance of the history. But she said it would be presented Feb. 2 at the first hearing of the Commission on Wartime Contracting, which was created this year as a result of legislation sponsored by Senators Jim Webb of Virginia and Claire McCaskill of Missouri, both Democrats.

The manuscript is based on about 500 new interviews, as well as more than 600 audits, inspections and investigations on which Bowen's office has reported individually over the years. Laid out for the first time in a connected history, the material forms the basis for broad judgments on the entire rebuilding program.

In the preface, Bowen gives a searing critique of what he calls the "blinkered and disjointed prewar planning for Iraq's reconstruction" and the botched expansion of the program from a modest initiative to improve Iraqi services to a multibillion-dollar enterprise.

Bowen also swipes at the endless revisions and reversals of the program, which at various times gyrated from a focus on giant construction projects led by large Western contractors to modest community-based initiatives carried out by local Iraqis. While Bowen concedes that deteriorating security had a hand in spoiling the program's hopes, he suggests, as he has in the past, that the program did not need much outside help to do itself in.

Despite years of studying the program, Bowen writes that he still has not found a good answer to the question of why the program was even pursued as soaring violence made it untenable.

"But beyond the security issue stands another compelling and unavoidable answer: The U.S. government was not adequately prepared to carry out the reconstruction mission it took on in mid-2003," he concludes.

The history cites some projects as successes. The review praises communi-

ty outreach efforts by the Agency for International Development, the Treasury Department's plan to stabilize the Iraqi dinar after the invasion and a joint effort by the Departments of State and Defense to create local rebuilding teams.

But the portrait that emerges overall is one of a program's officials operating by the seat of their pants in the middle of a critical enterprise abroad, where the reconstruction was supposed to convince the Iraqi citizenry of U.S. good will and support the new democracy with lights that turned on and taps that flowed with clean water. Mostly, it is a portrait of a program that seemed to grow exponentially as even those involved from the inception of the effort watched in surprise.

On the eve of the invasion, as it began to dawn on a few U.S. officials that the price for rebuilding Iraq would be vastly greater than they had been told, the degree of miscalculation was illustrated in an encounter between Donald Rumsfeld, then the defense secretary, and Jay Garner, the retired lieutenant general who had hastily been named the chief of what would be a short-lived civilian authority called the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance.

The history records how Garner presented Rumsfeld with several alternative rebuilding plans, including one that would include projects across Iraq.

"What do you think that'll cost?" Rumsfeld asked of the more expansive plan.

"I think it's going to cost billions of dollars," Garner said.

"My friend," Rumsfeld replied, "if you think we're going to spend a billion dollars of our money over there, you are sadly mistaken."

In a way he never anticipated, Rumsfeld turned out to be correct: Before that year was out, the United States had appropriated more than \$20 billion for the reconstruction, which would indeed involve projects across the entire country.

Rumsfeld declined comment on the report, but a spokesman, Keith Urbahn, said quotes attributed to him in the document "appear to be accurate." Powell also declined to comment.

T. Christian Miller, of ProPublica, reported from Washington.

19 décembre 2008

LE FIGARO

Des nostalgiques de Saddam arrêtés au ministère de l'Intérieur

IRAK. Plusieurs fonctionnaires du ministère de l'Intérieur ont été arrêtés ces derniers jours à Bagdad, accusés de vouloir reconstituer l'ancien parti Baas, tout puissant au temps de Saddam Hussein. Ces officiers sont soupçonnés d'appartenir au mouvement «Awda» (Le Retour), une création d'anciens membres du Baas, selon le général Abdoul Karim Khalaf, porte-parole du ministère. Ils auraient, non pas

chercher à fomenter un coup d'État, comme l'a écrit le *New York Times*, mais plutôt à incendier une partie du ministère, peut-être pour faire disparaître des documents compromettants pour eux, selon un autre responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur. Ces fonctionnaires seraient moins d'une trentaine. Ils ont été arrêtés par une unité, chargée des dossiers sensibles de sécurité, qui est contrôlée directement par le

bureau du premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki. D'importantes sommes d'argent auraient été retrouvées sur les fonctionnaires baasistes interpellés.

(Reuters)



Le général Abdoul Karim Khalaf a précisé hier que les officiers étaient soupçonnés d'appartenir au mouvement «Awda». AFP

La visite d'adieu mouvementée de Bush en Irak

ÉTATS-UNIS

Trois semaines après l'accord sur le retrait des troupes américaines, le quatrième et dernier voyage éclair de George W. Bush à Bagdad a été marqué par un incident.

De notre correspondant à New York

GEORGE W. Bush aura au moins eu le mérite d'assumer jusqu'au bout son bilan discutable en Irak. C'est la tête haute que le président américain est arrivé hier à Bagdad, en plein jour, contrairement à ses trois précédents voyages surprises, comme pour souligner les progrès accomplis en matière de sécurité après le renforcement des troupes américaines (30 000 hommes supplémentaires) en 2007. Cette quatrième visite éclair intervient moins de 72 heures après l'attentat de jeudi dernier qui a fait 48 morts dans la capitale irakienne.

Bush a limité ses mouvements aux zones sécurisées sous contrôle chiite. Mais un incident a marqué sa rencontre dans le bureau du premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki. Un journaliste irakien lui a jeté, sans l'atteindre, deux chaussures, et l'a insulté, criant : « C'est le baiser de l'adieu, espèce de chien. » Des journalistes irakiens se sont levés pour s'excuser tandis que Bush en plaisantant mentionnait qu'il s'agissait de chaussures de taille 44.

En faisant ses adieux aux quelque 149 000 soldats américains encore sur place (ils ont été jusqu'à 170 000), le commandant en chef avait quelques éléments positifs à faire valoir : le mois dernier, le nombre de victimes civiles d'attentats est tombé à son plus bas niveau (moins de 500 alors qu'on en avait dénombré 3 500 en janvier 2007) et les attaques hebdomadaires contre les troupes occupantes ont été divisées par cinq, passant de 1 500 en juin 2007 à moins de 300 aujourd'hui.

Le terrain est donc déblayé pour un retrait militaire qui permettra, aux yeux des Américains, de tourner la page de l'épisode le plus marquant et le plus controversé de la présidence Bush.

Échéancier

Le bout du tunnel est en vue depuis la ratification, par le Parlement irakien il y a trois semaines, de l'accord qui prévoit le départ des troupes américaines en deux étapes, d'ici à la fin 2011. George W. Bush s'en est félicité hier avec le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, passant sous silence l'opposition qu'il avait maintes fois manifestée, jusqu' alors, à tout échéancier.

Barack Obama, qui avait annoncé un retrait progressif sur seize mois, devra ajuster son calendrier. L'accord de sécurité bilatéral prend le relais des résolutions du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies pour autoriser la présence militaire étrangère en Irak au-delà du 1^{er} janvier. Il n'empêchera pas le nouveau président américain de transférer dès que possible 20 000 hommes en Afghanistan.

La première tranche du retrait est programmée dans les zones urbaines pour l'été 2009. Mais le général Odierno, commandant des forces américaines

en Irak, a précisé samedi que des troupes d'encadrement pourraient rester stationnées à Bagdad et dans d'autres villes en vue des consultations électorales de l'an prochain, notamment les provinciales.

George Bush était accompagné de Robert Gates, en visite surprise lui aussi, et qui restera aux commandes du Pentagone dans les premiers mois de l'Administration Obama.

George W. Bush transmet à son successeur une situation dont il a dit, dans son allocution radiodiffusée hebdomadaire du 6 décembre, qu'elle avait été « retournée » par sa stratégie de renforcement militaire. Près de six ans après l'invasion, il reste convaincu que l'histoire lui rendra grâce d'avoir renversé Saddam Hussein et libéré le peuple irakien, au prix de plus de 4 200 vies américaines et 576 milliards de dollars à ce jour.

JEAN-LOUIS TURLIN



Hier soir à Bagdad, en pleine conférence de presse avec le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki, George W. Bush a échappé à un jet de chaussures provenant d'un journaliste irakien. Il a esquivé l'objet volant en baissant la tête, un réflexe qu'il a réitéré lors du second lancer (ci-dessus, à droite).



December 16, 2008

Iranian artillery shells border regions in Sulaimaniya

SULAIMANIYA / Aswat al-Iraq: The Iranian artillery is shelling the mountain regions in Sulaimaniya since Tuesday afternoon without leaving casualties, the director of Zarawa district said.

"The Iranian artillery started shelling the villages of Rizka, Mardo, Shinawa in Zarawa district, north of Qalaat Daza district, since this afternoon," Azad Wasso told Aswat al-Iraq.

"The shelling caused panic among residents, but left no casualties," he noted.

The Iranian army is shelling these areas under the pretext they harbor the PJAK fighters.

The PJAK, or the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan), is a militant Kurdish nationalist group based in northern Iraq that has been carrying out attacks in the Kurdistan Province of Iran and other Kurdish-inhabited areas.

PJAK is a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (Koma

Civakên Kurdistan or KCK), which is an alliance of outlawed Kurdish groups and divisions led by an elected Executive Council. The Kurdistan Workers Party (KK) is listed as a terrorist organization internationally by a number of states and organizations, including the United States, NATO and the EU, and is also a member of KCK.

Led by Haji Ahmadi, the PJAK's objective is to establish a semi-autonomous regional entities or Kurdish federal states in Iran, Turkey and Syria similar to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq.

The PJAK, an Iranian Kurdish party that broke away from the PKK, or Partiya Karekeren Kurdistan in Kurdish, in 2004 after the imprisonment of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, started its armed struggle against the regime in Iran with the aim of building a federacy for Iran's Kurdistan. The PJAK has about 3,000 armed militiamen.

Sulaimaniya, one of the KRG's three cities, lies 364 km north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad.



December 15, 2008

Kurdistan press syndicate condemns attack on Bush

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq: The Kurdistan Press Syndicate on Monday condemned the attack by Muntadher al-Zaydi, the correspondent for al-Boghdadiya satellite channel, on U.S. President George W. Bush when Zaydi hurled his shoes at him.

"We in the Kurdistan press syndicate denounce the uncivilized assault and deem it a far cry from manners and ethics of the press," the syndicate chief, Firhad Awani, told Aswat al-Iraq.

President Bush quickly ducked when a pair of shoes were hurled at him Sunday.

"This is a gift from the Iraqis. This is the farewell kiss, you dog," Zaydi shouted in Arabic as he threw his shoe at Bush during a news conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The shoe narrowly missed the president's head.

The man, a correspondent for Al-Boghdadiya television, an Iraqi-owned station

based in Cairo, then pulled off his other shoe and chucked it, yelling, "This is from the widows, the orphans and those who were killed in Iraq."

Bush ducked again as al-Maliki put out his arm to block the shoe.

Zaydi, a young man of no more than 30 years old, has worked for al-Boghdadiya since its establishment in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. He had been kidnapped two years ago by unidentified gunmen while stepping out of his home in al-Bab al-Sharqi area, central Baghdad. A week later he was found lying on the ground near auto selling stores in al-Nahda square, Baghdad, at a late night hour.

Zaydi is considered one of the journalists outspokenly criticizing the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq. He had written several reports opposing the U.S. military presence in the country.

To Iraqis, the incident represented a major insult to the U.S. president.



December 16, 2008

Hiding from Kirkuk

The city of Kirkuk remains a dangerous flashpoint in Iraq. But who will grasp the nettle?

Ranj Alaaldin

In a recent article for Cif I mentioned that Iraq still has a sensitive political arena that could explode at any point. Well, last week we were reminded of an untouched and unresolved issue that could take us to that point. A suicide bomber in Kirkuk killed 50 and seriously wounded 100 others in horrific fashion. Hundreds have been killed in Kirkuk in similar attacks over the past two years.

Under the Arabisation campaign launched in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein displaced thousands

of Kurds from Kirkuk and relocated Arab families to the area in an effort to change the demographic landscape of the historically Kurdish-majority city.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) wants Kirkuk returned to Kurdish administration, while most Arabs and Turkmen of the ethnically diverse city oppose this. Under the Iraqi constitution, Article 140 provides for a referendum to be held to determine the status of the city. Voting has been delayed repeatedly, however, out of fears that a referendum would stir tensions and lead to ethnic war. Continuing disputes at one point seemed likely to prevent

any provincial elections taking place. As a compromise, Kirkuk will not take part in the provincial elections next month and its current council, dominated by the Kurds, will stay as it is.

As the January elections loom closer, the Kirkuk attack was a grim reminder that things in Iraq may get messier and more complicated. Kirkuk is messy and sensitive. The situation is complicated because of the lack of political will, external influences, and the lack of trust among Iraq's political parties.

Continued delays are the result of a number of misperceptions.

The first is the notion that the KRG will

eventually stop persisting on applying Article 140 of the constitution and accept a compromise that falls short of having a referendum on the status of Kirkuk and any eventual Kurdish control of the city.

This then provides the impetus to perpetually drag the Kirkuk issue down the road, not taking Kirkuk away from the Kurds but not actually giving it to them either. Anti-referendum Arabs, Turkmen, and the central government prevent the city from falling under Kurdish hands, while UNAMI and the US avoid an ethnic war – for them a victory of convenience rather than anything else.

Proposed solutions have been flooding in. The International Crisis Group recently suggested that the Kurds relinquish their constitutional rights under Article 140 for the next 10 years, in return for the right to export their own oil through Turkey. Turkey will permit this, they say, in the event the KRG takes on their other suggestion – the disarming of the PKK, the Kurdish guerrilla organisation that Nato's second largest army has itself failed to disarm over the past 30 years.

The KRG is not in any case guaranteed control of Kirkuk should a referendum take place. In addition to remaining under Baghdad's control or joining the Kurdistan region, other options for the local population include making Kirkuk a stand-alone federal entity. Like many, the ICG report makes a dangerous assumption that it is all about the oil for the KRG. Kirkuk is bigger than oil and bigger than the KRG. Kurdish claims to Kirkuk are rooted in history, geography and demographics. It is rooted in Kurdish identity; any abandonment of Article 140 – and delaying its implementation for 10 years is in

effect abandonment – would be political suicide for the ruling political parties, however attractive the offer.

The Kurds, it seems, are damned whatever they do. Rather than take full control and implement authority over Kirkuk in 2003, they opted for a peaceful and legal path, one of reconciliation, choosing the power of law and democracy over the power of the Kalashnikov. Their strongest weapon has so far been the constitution. The constitution is what binds the complicated mosaic that is Iraq. Under the constitution, failure to implement Article 140, however, provides the Kurdish Alliance with a legitimate licence to withdraw from the Iraqi union. Iraq may have adopted a constitution that it was never ready for.

Kirkuk provides an opportunity to score political points before the electorate heads to the polls for the provincial elections. It provides an opportunity for the prime minister's Dawa party, the Sadrists and Sunni nationalist parties to play towards nationwide anti-Kurdish sentiments. It provides an opportunity for them to consolidate power in the centre and limit the powers of any federal region.

In the south there are similar territorial disputes. ISCI, hoping to establish an autonomous federal zone in the region, have their own territorial disputes and will be looking for KRG support; they are in favour of implementing Article 140.

Regional neighbours have also brought their influences to bear. Turkey is vehemently opposed to any referendum and the prospect of Kirkuk falling within KRG boundaries, whatever the democratic or legal context behind it. It retains its influence in the city through its

Turkmen proxies and, through them, plays an indirect part in electoral negotiations.

External actors, along with an ethnically biased media, further enflame tensions. During my recent trip to Iraq, including a visit to Kirkuk, I found claims that the Arabs and Turkmen feared the KRG peshmerga to be wholly untrue. Contrary to news reports, Kirkuk is not protected by KRG security only, but also by Iraqi army forces who have a significant, if not superior, presence in the city.

Of course, not all Arabs are anti-Article 140. In most cases it is those being forced to leave Kirkuk that are. With respect to the Turkmen, it is a case of resolving grievances vis-à-vis power sharing arrangements and dissolving the influence of external actors – the latter a more colossal, if not impossible, task than the former.

Whether the procedural technicalities and other contentious issues related to Article 140 have been resolved is not the issue. Instead, one has to ask whether those against implementing Article 140 will ever be in favour of its implementation. All things taken into consideration, that is most unlikely. Consequently, delaying Article 140 and holding the constitution hostage is not a solution.

Meeting head-on the problems any implementation will provide is, however, a step towards a solution. The counter argument to this is that implementing Article 140 will ignite a bloody ethnic conflict that could have been avoided. The response? If Iraq can overcome challenges from Basra, if it can overcome challenges from Fallujah, and the rivalries of the Shia south, then it also has the cojones to overcome the problems of Kirkuk. In Iraq, there is no hiding from conflict.

Hürriyet

December 19, 2008

Turkish state TV invites controversial Kurdish singer Sivan Perwer

ANKARA. — Turkey's state-run broadcaster TRT invited controversial Kurdish singer, Sivan Perwer, to perform at the opening of its Kurdish TV channel. The Kurdish singer is cold to the proposal.

As part of developing the cultural rights of Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin, state-owned Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) decided to begin the broadcast of a solely Kurdish language TV channel that will air around the clock as of January 1, 2009.

As preparations continue for the inauguration of the Kurdish TV, as part of the country's official broadcaster, TRT invited Kurdish singers, including Perwer, and Nilufer Akbal, a well-known female singer among Kurdish people, to participate in the celebrations.

Perwer, whose real name is Ismail Aygun, has been living in Germany for 35 years, he left Turkey for not being allowed to sing in Kurdish.

He lost his Turkish citizenship in 1986. In 2004, a lawyer representing Perwer demanded he be allowed to enter the country. Turkish authorities responded to the request saying Perwer would be free to enter the country on a foreign passport, as he is no longer a Turkish citizen.

Perwer is not expected to attend the opening ceremony; however broadcaster CNNTurk said that he viewed making a TV program for the Kurdish channel positively.

Perwer is known to be against Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) organization.

Earlier media reports suggested some ruling AKP deputies demanded a

showy start to the channel with the appearance of Sezen Aksu, the queen of Turkish pop.

The channel is expected to be named, TRT 8 or Hest, eight in Kurdish, CNNTurk also reported.

Since 1984 the Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) took up arms for self-rule in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey (Turkey-Kurdistan). A large Turkey's Kurdish community openly sympathise with the Kurdish PKK rebels. Turkey refuses to recognize its Kurdish population as a distinct minority.

The PKK demanded Turkey's recognition of the Kurds' identity in its constitution and of their language as a native language along with Turkish in the country's Kurdish areas, the party also demanded an end to ethnic discrimination in Turkish laws and constitution against Kurds, ranting them full political freedoms.

The PKK is considered a 'terrorist' organization by Ankara, U.S., the PKK continues to be on the blacklist list in EU despite court ruling which overturned a decision to place the Kurdish rebel group PKK and its political wing on the European Union's terror list.

Turkey refuses to recognize its Kurdish population as a distinct minority. It has allowed some cultural rights such as limited broadcasts in the Kurdish language and private Kurdish language courses with the prodding of the European Union, but Kurdish politicians say the measures fall short of their expectations.



Special Report

Turks and Iraqi Kurds Don't Let Politics Get in Way of Business

Relations between the two remain cool, as trade and other economic ties flourish.

By Caroline Tosh in London and Muhamad Shekh Fatih in Sulaimaniyah

TRADE BETWEEN Turkey and Iraqi Kurds is booming, but stronger political relations still seem a long way off, say observers.

Turkish construction projects can be found all over northern Iraq, while the region's supermarket shelves are stacked with consumer products imported from across the border.

However, analysts told IWPR that this economic activity largely reflects the opportunism of Turkish enterprises, rather than a deeper cooperation between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan.

They say that while soaring trade may have helped ease tensions, building stronger political ties – and securing Turkey's recognition of the region's autonomy – is likely to be a lengthy and uncertain process.

As its gateway to trade and communication with the rest of the world, Turkey's importance to landlocked Kurdistan is clear. Ankara, meanwhile, relies on border trade with northern Iraq to bring revenue to the country's poor south-eastern provinces.

During Saddam's reign, Turkey enjoyed close ties with the Kurdish parties. Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, held a Turkish diplomatic passport until recently.

The two main Kurdish parties fought alongside the Turkish military and independently against the Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, in the late Nineties, while Turkey was critical in the development of Iraqi Kurdistan by providing a base for United States and British aircraft patrolling the no-fly zone over northern Iraq.

Today, however, relations are soured by the continuing presence of PKK rebels in the Qandil mountains in northern Iraq.

For the last 25 years, the PKK and Turkey have been locked in a bitter conflict, which has claimed the lives of thousands in the region. The PKK says it is defending Kurds and other minorities in Turkey, which human rights groups accuse Ankara of oppressing.

The Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG, has resisted Turkey's calls to help defeat the separatists – considered to be terrorists by both Ankara and Washington – saying that it cannot tackle them in such treacherous terrain.

Meanwhile, the Turkish government refuses to recognise the KRG's autonomy, fearing this could encourage the PKK, spark an uprising among Turkey's own sizable Kurdish minority, and even lead to the partition of the country.

In May, the first meeting to be held between the current Turkish and Kurdish leaders – at which they discussed how best to tackle the PKK as well as Turkish investment in Kurdistan – took place in Baghdad.

FLOURISHING INVESTMENT

The political breakthrough came amid burgeoning trade between the two.

In the five years since the overthrow of Saddam's regime, the value of commercial transactions has soared. It is now estimated to stand at up to three billion US dollars annually, and economists predict that this amount will rise by 250 per cent over the next few years.

Today, thousands of trucks carrying construction materials and consumer goods cross through the Khabur border-crossing from Turkey into northern Iraq each day.

Nearly 500 Turkish companies are currently registered in Iraqi Kurdistan, creating jobs and wealth in the region so long neglected under Ba'athist rule.

Turkish products, which are largely better quality than goods imported from Iran and Syria, are eagerly consumed in the region. Northern Iraqis can now buy items of every type in American-style supermarkets, while western fashion boutiques are appearing around Erbil, the region's capital.

"People here are excited by the fashion that comes from Turkey which looks slightly more European than that from the Emirates or Dubai – it's something new and it's interesting," said Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG High Representative to the UK.

"In our shops and supermarkets, you'll see many Turkish goods, so there's a

great deal going on here that's helping the market, helping the economy, and it's coming from Turkey."

As well as consumer goods, Iraqi Kurdistan also relies on Turkey to supply some ten per cent of its electricity.

Iraq's powerful neighbour is also reaping the rewards of fast-growing economic ties.

"Turkey needs this business [with northern Iraq] to try to increase prosperity in south-east Turkey which [contains] some of the most impoverished regions in the country," said Fadi Hakura, Associate Fellow at Chatham House.

"[Investment in Kurdistan] is a very critical economic lifeline to the south east – especially considering the fact that 15,000 workers from Turkey are working in northern Iraq."

Some observers have suggested that by investing in the region, Turkey is seeking somehow to spread its influence there.

"By [introducing] products, advertisements and services [into northern Iraq], Turkey can spread the Turkish culture and build a strong economic position through the relationship," said Ayub Anwar Smaqayi, lecturer in administration and economics at the University of Salahadin.

Jabar Qadir, an expert on Turkish-Kurdish relations and a lecturer in the history department of Koya University, also believes that Turkey is investing in the region to increase its political leverage there.

"Whatever job Turkey does in the region is politically motivated," he said.

The opening of a new Turkish university in Iraqi Kurdistan last month was heralded by Kurdish leaders as a step towards building stronger formal ties.

"The opening of this university signifies the building of another bridge in our relations, one that will take us toward the right approach," said Iraqi Kurdistan prime minister Nechirvan Barzani, at the opening ceremony.

EFFECT OF ENHANCED COOPERATION

But while Turkey seems content to make economic and cultural forays into Kurdistan, the country stops short of political acceptance of the region.

"Although the Turkish government recognises the economic importance of the relationship, this does not mean that they are willing to sacrifice what they consider their political interests – namely, to prevent any kind of an independent Kurdistan emerging in northern Iraq," said Hakura.

Analysts point out the irony of Turkey helping to build up the autonomous region when it remains bitterly opposed to its independence aspirations.

"It is giving economic legitimacy to Iraqi Kurdistan and still, politically, on the other hand, Turkey opposes Iraqi Kurdistan, so it's like the left hand of Turkey doesn't know what the right-hand is doing," said political science professor Michael Gunter at Tennessee Tech University.

While Turkey's policy appears inconsistent, it seems, nonetheless, to have survived even during periods of heightened tensions.

At the height of Turkey's attacks on PKK guerrillas in December 2007, when the Turkish military launched cross-border attacks – a move condemned by the KRG – the Ibrahim-Khalil trade route remained open.

At the same time, dozens of Turkish companies took part in international industrial exhibitions held in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, the second largest city in the region.

"The economic ties are rarely affected by the political position, so the commercial and economic relations between Turkey and the region develop constantly," said Dara Jaleel Khayat, head of the Commercial and Industrial Chambers in Kurdistan.

Some note that while formal political relations have been fraught, friendships exist between politicians on both sides.

"There are personal relations between Kurdish and Turkish officials, but we want to enhance and build on those relations based on international law and regulations," said Falah Mustafa, the official in charge of the Kurdistan Region's Foreign Relations Office.

CHANGE ON THE HORIZON?

Observers point to several political factors that could have a bearing on the development of Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish relations.

American troops are preparing to withdraw from Iraq over the next two years, thus strengthening Turkey's position with regard to the Iraqi Kurds.

The explosive problem of Kirkuk must also be solved. Iraqi Kurdistan authorities would like the status of the oil-rich and ethnically diverse city settled by referendum, and a provision for this is set out in the country's constitution.

But a plebiscite, which was due to take place in December of last year, seems to have been postponed indefinitely – in part, as a result of strong Turkish pressure.

Turkey – along with other ethnic groups living in Kirkuk – has opposed this solution, claiming to be championing the interests of the region's Turkomans, to whom they are ethnically and linguistically related.

Analysts say the Turks are worried that if KRG absorbs Kirkuk, it could use its oil money to help establish an independent and wealthy Kurdish entity, with which the increasingly troubled Kurdish south in Turkey might then seek ties.

The problem of the Kurdish separatists is a further sticking point that will be hard to overcome, with neither side seemingly prepared to back down.

A high-ranking official of one of the Kurdish political parties, who preferred to stay anonymous, told IWPR, "Neither the PUK [Patriotic Union of Kurdistan] nor the KDP [Kurdistan Democratic Party] will join the Turkish front and fight the PKK again."

Meanwhile, Ankara remains keen to exploit the vast reserves of oil, and perhaps gas, which are thought to lie untapped in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"Already there are pipelines which transport oil from northern Iraq into Turkey, to export to foreign markets, so Turkey wants to develop that energy relationship," said Hakura.

With so many factors at play, it is uncertain how the relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan will develop.

"It depends mostly on Kurdistan – if it keeps its independence aspirations in check, things should be fine, probably," said senior fellow at the Brookings Institution Michael O'Hanlon.

Some analysts feel that as this economic cooperation deepens, political relations are also genuinely warming up.

"Just in the last six to eight months, there has been rapid improvement in relations between the two sides," said Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group, ICG.

Kurdish president Massoud Barzani met Turkish officials for the first time in three years in Baghdad on October 14. Significantly, a second meeting was held in Erbil, on October 28, said Hiltermann.

"We will see this moving to higher and higher levels all the time," said Hiltermann, predicting that trade would increase even more, strengthening economic and diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Kurdistan region.

"Two issues have divided them – the PKK and the issue of Kirkuk. They haven't been resolved, but they're talking about them," he said.

"They can talk about them in a rational way, and I think they will be able to find some sort of compromise where neither side will be totally happy, but they can live with whatever solution is found.

"But that's still going to take a bit of time. I would not say that this will happen in the next few months – it may take another year or two."

Rahman said that the Kurdistan region is keen to maintain "good and friendly relations" with its influential neighbour.

"Turkey may one day join the European Union, it is part of NATO – it's a big player in the Middle East," he said.

"It's also in Turkey's interest to have good relations with the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Iraq, as a whole.

"I think that things will get better, but that doesn't mean it's going to be a smooth path or that it's going to be quick. Quite often, these things take time but we're ready to work on that in any way needed."

Gunter said there was evidence of a political thaw, marked by a snail's pace change in Turkish attitudes in recent years.

"Very slowly, Turkey is coming to accept the concept of the Kurds," said Gunter, who sits on the board of directors of the EU Turkey Civic Commission, set up to promote Turkish membership of the bloc.

"But whether this is going to be quickly enough to satisfy the requirements of the Kurds and the rest of the world in the fast-changing Middle East, I don't know."

Turkey's gradual progress towards meeting conditions for joining the EU could help normalise relations with Iraqi Kurdistan, he said.

The country began EU accession negotiations in 2005, and the success of its bid depends on it pushing through political reforms and addressing the socio-economic problems faced by Kurds living in Turkey.

"If Turkey met the Copenhagen criteria [the rules that define whether a country is eligible to attain] EU membership, it would largely give the Kurds what they want in Turkey, and I think would lead to Turkey becoming less paranoid about the Iraqi Kurds," he said.

"The economic investment Turkey has made in Iraqi Kurdistan gives Turkey a political incentive to cautiously recognise what the Kurds are accomplishing [in the region]."

Caroline Tosh is an IWPR editor in London and Muhamad Shekh Fatih is an IWPR-trained journalist in Sulaimaniyah.

18 December 2008



DTP's visit to Kurdistan Region regarded as positive Leaders in Kurdistan Region urge DTP to gain rights in peaceful ways.

By Kamal Chomani
The Kurdish Globe

The pro-Kurdish Society Party (DTP) could gain a better position in the upcoming municipality elections set for March next year. Meanwhile the party is still facing a legal case at a Turkish court that could determine DTP's political future

A delegation from the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) from Turkey visited Kurdistan region and had talks with Kurdistan region president, Massoud Barzani, Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani and several other Kurdish officials. The DTP delegation was led by the party's leader, Ahmet Turk. The meeting with the Kurdish president took place last Saturday in Barzani's Salahaddin resort-residence.

"In the meeting, President Barzani and Ahmet Turk emphasized that the problems in the region should be resolved

through dialogue," a statement posted on Kurdistan regional government's (KRG) official website read.

Then on Monday, the delegation met Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani. "President Talabani has honored the DTP's struggle to get Kurdish rights in Turkey in a democratic means," said the official website of Talabani's party, Kurdistan Patriotic Union (PUK).

Meanwhile, the spokesman of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Ahmed Daniz told Kurdish Globe that PKK regards the DTP visit to Kurdistan region as a positive step.

"We are very happy for such visits. Wherever they are, Kurds need to cooperate with each other," said Daniz. "Kurds need to build bridge of dialogue and we want the problems to be solved through channels of communication."

Turk was accompanied by the party's

co-leader, Emine Ayna, Istanbul deputy Sabahat Tuncel, Siirt deputy Osman Ozcelil and deputy council member Abdullah Demirbas.

Earlier this year, a DTP delegation led by Ahmed Turk visited Kurdistan region and had talks with Iraqi president and Kurdistan region's parliament speaker, Adnan Mufti, but the delegation failed to meet president Barzani.

DTP currently faces the Turkish Court on charges of being "a focal point of terrorism". If the court wins DTP may be shut down. PKK spokesman, on the other, hand denied any links between his party and DTP.

"DTP is an independent Kurdish party. PKK has no links with it," Daniz told Globe.

Currently, DTP is the only legally operating Kurdish party in Turkey; it has 21 seats in the Turkish parliament. Political observ-



ers believe that DTP could gain a better position in the March municipality elections planned for next year.

Des milliers de Turcs demandent « pardon » aux Arméniens

Quatre intellectuels issus de la gauche ont lancé sur Internet une pétition contre l'« indifférence » adoptée jusqu'ici en Turquie à l'égard de « la Grande Catastrophe »

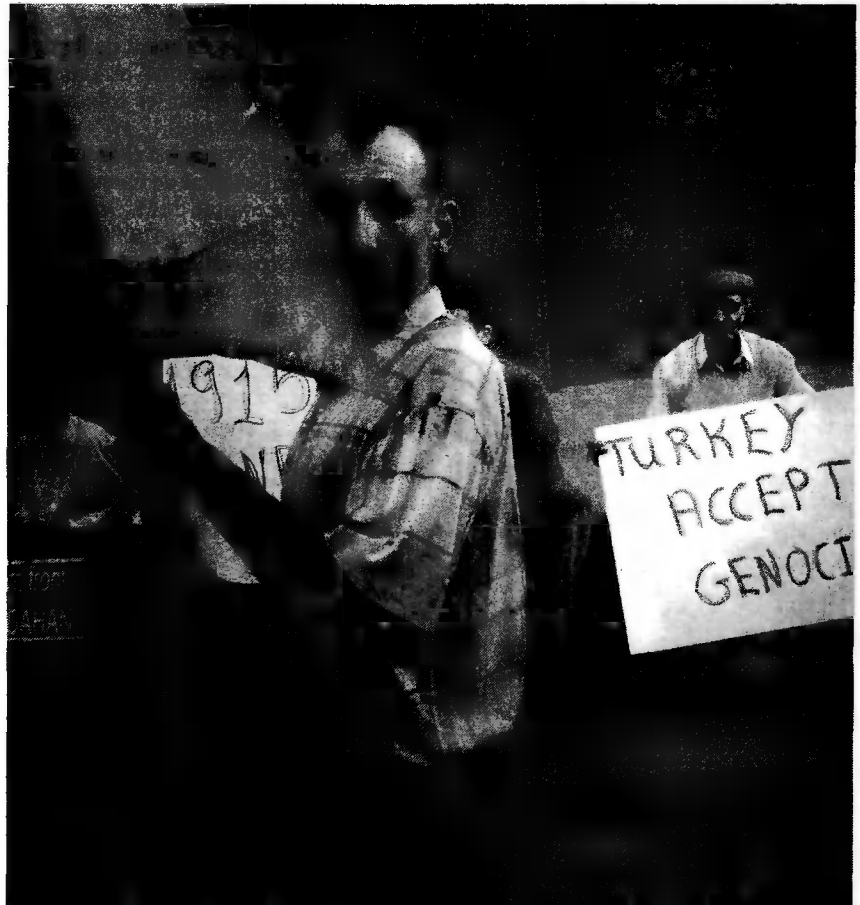
ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

En quatre jours, plus de 13 000 Turcs ont signé la pétition lancée, lundi 15 décembre, sur Internet. « *Ma conscience ne peut pas accepter que l'on reste indifférent et que l'on nie la "grande catastrophe" subie par les Arméniens ottomans en 1915, dit le texte d'introduction. Je rejette cette injustice et, pour ma part, je partage les sentiments et les peines de mes frères et sœurs arméniens. Je leur demande pardon.* »

Ces excuses adressées aux victimes du génocide de 1915 ont été formulées par quatre intellectuels issus de la gauche turque : l'économiste Ahmet Insel, le professeur de sciences politiques Baskin Oran, le spécialiste des questions européennes, Cengiz Aktar, et le chroniqueur, Ali Bayramoglu. Le mot génocide n'apparaît pas, l'expression « *grande catastrophe* », utilisée par les Arméniens, lui a été préféré.

Mais cette initiative inédite de la société civile est un pas supplémentaire dans le rapprochement entre Turcs et Arméniens, opéré ces derniers mois, notamment depuis la visite à Erevan du président de la République, Abdullah Gül, en septembre. « *Cela montre qu'il y a au moins 13 000 personnes qui ne croient pas dans la propagande officielle, constate Cengiz Aktar. Mais il faut y aller doucement. Sur ces terres où ont été commis des massacres, la mémoire a été gommée et remplacée par le négationnisme.* »

Sans surprise, les réactions haineuses ont fusé de toutes parts à l'annonce de cette campagne. « Une blague », selon Ertugrul Özkök, le rédacteur en chef du quotidien nationaliste *Hürriyet*, voire « un acte de trahison », pour la députée du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, kémaliste), Canan Aritman. Une soixantaine de diplomates à la retraite ont estimé, eux, qu'il s'agissait d'une initiative « *inacceptable, fautive et défavorable aux intérêts de la nation. Une telle tentative, incorrecte et partielle est irrespectueuse*



Des sympathisants du parti arménien Dachnak ont manifesté près du stade d'Erevan lors de la visite du président turc, Abdullah Gül, en septembre, au cours de laquelle les équipes de football des deux pays se sont rencontrées. CLEMENT SACCOMANI POUR « LE MONDE »

pour notre histoire et revient à trahir notre peuple », ont-ils écrit. Pour le député du Parti de l'action nationaliste (MHP), Deniz Bölükbaşı, « *si quelqu'un doit s'excuser, ce sont les intellectuels et les Arméniens. Ils devraient s'excuser pour les atrocités dont ont souffert des milliers d'Anatoliens.* »

Le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, n'a pas été le moins virulent. « *Je ne l'accepte pas, je ne la soutiens pas. Nous n'avons commis aucun crime, donc nous n'avons pas besoin de nous excuser* », a-t-il riposté, mercredi. Certains intellectuels, tels Nuray Mert ou Murat Belge, critiquent eux aussi cette logique de repentance.

Plus mesuré, le président Abdullah Gül, loin de condamner la pétition, a estimé que chacun était libre de donner son opinion. Même tonalité au ministère des

affaires étrangères : « *Nous n'avons pas à réagir contre cela* », répond un porte-parole, mettant en évidence des divergences au sein du gouvernement.

Les intellectuels à l'origine de ces excuses publiques reçoivent, eux, depuis quelques jours, des tombereaux d'insultes et de menaces de mort. Pas de quoi les décourager pour autant. « *C'est une ligne de crête en Turquie*, souligne Cengiz Aktar. *Ce qui est nouveau, c'est que ce qui n'était qu'un débat d'intellectuels devient les prémices d'un débat public.* »

Baskin Oran souligne, lui, la nécessité pour la fière Turquie de se doter d'une « *culture du pardon* ». Un mot encore difficile à entendre. « *C'est une chose qui n'existe pas chez nous*, admet Uraz, un étudiant qui envisage de signer la pétition. *Mais on vit sous ce régime qui n'accepte pas la réalité historique et si cela ne change pas, c'est un peu de notre faute.* » ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

« Nous n'avons commis aucun crime, donc nous n'avons pas besoin de nous excuser »

Recep Tayyip Erdogan
premier ministre turc

LE FIGARO

23 décembre 2008

Les Moudjahidins du peuple indésirables en Irak

PROCHE-ORIENT

Bagdad exige le départ de leur base, située au nord de Bagdad, des 3300 membres de ce mouvement d'opposants iraniens. La France refuse de les accueillir. Le siège du mouvement se situe à Auvers-sur-Oise.

De notre envoyé spécial à Téhéran

ÉPAULÉS par un trafiquant, avec 30 000 dollars en poche, des kalachnikovs et deux téléphones satellitaires pour contacter leurs commanditaires restés en Irak, Babak et un autre moudjahidin franchirent la frontière pour s'infiltrer durant la nuit en Iran. Quelques semaines plus tard, le commando a réussi à attaquer à plusieurs reprises à la grenade le ministère de la Défense à Téhéran. Pour bien montrer au monde que la République islamique pouvait être déstabilisée de l'intérieur, avant une échéance aussi importante que l'élection présidentielle de 2001.

« Nous devons ensuite recruter des Iraniens, en attendant des renforts et des munitions en provenance du siège des Moudjahidins, à Ashraf, en Irak », se souvient ce quadragénaire. Ni les hommes ni les armes ne parviendront finalement à Babak, qui, à la place, reçut l'ordre de rentrer en Irak. Mais, un soir, des policiers l'appréhendèrent dans un centre commercial

de Téhéran. Condamné à dix ans de prison, l'opposant sera élargi, à l'issue de la moitié de sa peine. Aujourd'hui, ce repenté cherche à faire rentrer en Iran les derniers soldats perdus d'Ashraf, ce camp de fortune au nord de Bagdad, où quelque 3 300 moudjahidins sont installés depuis près de vingt ans.

Le 1^{er} janvier, l'US Army cédera le contrôle d'Ashraf au gouvernement irakien. Mais en annonçant, avant-hier, son intention de fermer le camp, Bagdad a pris tout le monde de court. Que vont devenir ses occupants ? « Ils n'ont plus de passeports, la plupart veulent aller en Europe et obtenir le statut de réfugié politique », estime Ashkar, un autre repenté, qui a quitté Ashraf en 2004, et travaille désormais pour une ONG contrôlée par Téhéran.

Sous la pression de ses alliés iraniens, Bagdad pourrait décider d'en renvoyer certains à Téhéran. Même si le communiqué du gouvernement irakien précise que le choix du pays d'accueil ne pourra se faire de « manière coercitive », et que Washington affirme avoir reçu des assurances de Bagdad en ce sens, les craintes demeurent. Pour échapper à un retour non désiré en Iran, certains moudjahidins n'auraient d'autres choix, alors, que de fuir en Europe, notamment en France, où 300 à 400 sont déjà installés, strictement surveillés par la DST, mais aussi infiltrés par les

agents iraniens. « Nous n'avons pas envie d'en voir arriver », prévient un expert français des questions de sécurité. « Certains pourraient se faire récupérer par les Iraniens, d'autres rejoindre Auvers, quant aux égarés qui ont un savoir-faire technique, ils pourraient rallier des réseaux salafistes voire al-Qaïda », ajoute-t-il.

Patate chaude

Problème : personne ne souhaite récupérer cette patate chaude. Pourtant, ces dernières années, les Américains ont sollicité à plusieurs reprises Français et Jordaniens, notamment. Mais à chaque fois, les uns et les autres ont refusé d'abriter leur chef, Massoud Radjavi, et les guérilleros d'Ashraf.

À leur arrivée en Irak en 2003, les Américains ont désarmé les moudjahidins. « Depuis, ils tuent le temps comme ils peuvent à Ashraf », poursuit Ashkar. « S'ils avaient le choix, beaucoup quitteraient les Moudjahidins », assure-t-il. Les Américains les considèrent comme une organisation terroriste, ce qui ne les empêche pas d'entretenir une relation ambiguë avec eux. « La CIA ne leur fait pas confiance, en revanche, le Pentagone en utilise certains pour espionner l'Iran », confesse l'un des repentis.

Profitant de la bienveillance américaine, 600 ont quitté Ashraf pour l'Iran, ces dernières années. « Téhéran gère ce dossier plutôt

intelligemment, cherchant à recycler plus qu'à liquider ses anciens opposants », observe un diplomate européen en Iran. Depuis la présidence réformatrice de Mohamad Khatami, « nous ne les considérons plus comme une organisation politique, mais comme une dangereuse secte dont les membres sont prisonniers de leurs dirigeants, auxquels ils doivent vouer un culte sans limite », estime un officiel iranien.

Leur capacité d'action en Iran a beau être quasi nulle, le régime voit rouge face à ces opposants. Ces derniers disposent encore de sympathisants à l'intérieur du pays. « Les moudjahidins ont profité de l'ouverture sous la présidence Khatami pour recruter des Iraniens qui voyageaient plus facilement à l'étranger », explique le diplomate.

Grâce à l'argent que Saddam leur versa et aux fonds qu'ils lèvent auprès de la diaspora iranienne, depuis Auvers, les moudjahidins déploient une intense activité de lobbying auprès des médias et des responsables politiques occidentaux. Avec un certain succès. Récemment, 290 députés français ont demandé qu'ils soient rayés de la liste des organisations terroristes. Et récemment, à Londres et à Luxembourg, plusieurs décisions de justice ont abondé en ce sens.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT



Les portraits de Massoud Radjavi et de son épouse Maryam, les dirigeants des Moudjahidins du peuple, ornent l'entrée du camp d'Ashraf, au nord de Bagdad, qui existe depuis près de vingt ans. Ali Youssef/AFP

Le Monde
25 décembre 2008

L'Irak donne un cadre juridique à la présence militaire britannique



Un soldat britannique et des membres de la police irakienne à Bassora (550 km au sud de Bagdad), où est stationnée la majorité des 4 100 soldats du Royaume-Uni. Le mandat de l'ONU qui autorise leur présence expire le 31 décembre. ESSAM EL-SUDANI/AFP

Le Parlement irakien a autorisé le maintien, pour six mois, des soldats dont le premier ministre britannique, Gordon Brown, a annoncé le retour au plus tard le 30 mai 2009

Une nouvelle et embarrassante crise politique a été évitée de justesse, mardi 23 décembre, à Bagdad. Grâce à la démission du président du Parlement, Mahmoud Al-Machhadani, un texte autorisant le gouvernement central à légaliser pour six mois supplémentaires la présence en Irak d'environ 5 000 soldats étrangers, essentiellement britanniques, a pu être voté in extremis par une majorité des 275 élus qui avaient fait du retrait de M. Machhadani, la condition sine qua non de leur vote.

Connu pour sa conduite erratique et ses écarts de langage, le politicien sunnite

salafiste, âgé de 60 ans, qui présidait le Parlement depuis les élections de 2005, avait traité de « chiens » et « fils de chiens » les élus qui réclamaient bruyamment, la semaine passée, un débat immédiat sur le sort de Mountazer Al-Zaïdi, le journaliste qui a lancé ses chaussures sur le président américain, George Bush. Le débat n'a pas eu lieu, et le procès du journaliste devrait s'ouvrir le 31 décembre à Bagdad.

Un contingent peu actif

L'accord passé, en novembre, entre Bagdad et Washington avait déjà permis d'autoriser la présence, pour trois années supplémentaires, des troupes américaines en Irak. Le sort des autres troupes étrangères restait à régler avant le 31 décembre, date de la fin du mandat des Nations unies qui « légalisait » leur présence. Or, le Royaume-Uni, qui avait participé à l'invasion de mars 2003 avec 46 000 soldats, dispose encore, dans le sud du pays, de 4 100 soldats dont le sta-

tut juridique n'a pas encore été négocié. A une semaine de la date butoir, le gouvernement irakien de Nouri Al-Maliki peut finalement reprendre la main.

Lors d'une visite à Bagdad, le 17 décembre, le premier ministre, Gordon Brown, a annoncé que le contingent britannique, basé depuis plus d'un an dans un aéroport dont il sort peu à Bassora, la deuxième ville du pays, serait intégralement rapatrié d'ici au 30 mai 2009, à l'exception d'environ 300 hommes destinés à la formation de la marine irakienne présentement en phase de reconstruction. Encore fallait-il que ce contingent dispose jusqu'à son départ d'un statut juridique adéquat en cas de problème. C'est fait.

Le général Raymond Odierno, qui commande les 146 000 soldats américains restant en Irak, a fait savoir, le 22 décembre, qu'il enverrait des hommes de son propre contingent prendre la place des Britanniques. « Preuve », écrivaient nombre d'éditorialistes de la presse de Londres, dont ceux du *Guardian* et de *The Independent*, « que la mission de nos troupes en Irak n'a jamais été proprement accomplie. » L'ancien premier ministre Tony Blair, qui, à l'instar du président Bush, avait coutume de dire que les troupes britanniques quitteraient l'Irak « lorsque le job aura été accompli », n'a jamais précisé ce qu'il entendait par là.

La coalition internationale emmenée en mars 2003 dans l'aventure irakienne a compté jusqu'à une quarantaine de pays, en majorité des petits Etats « alliés » de Washington. Hors les effectifs britanniques, il reste sur place, 980 Australiens, 498 Roumains, 280 Salvadoriens et 37 Estoniens. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

COALITION : TRENTE-QUATRE PAYS EN 2003, SEULEMENT SIX EN 2008

En novembre 2003, les contingents de la coalition internationale en Irak sous commandement américain s'élevaient à 155 138 hommes, venant de 34 pays.

Sept pays avaient envoyé plus de 1 000 hommes : les Etats-Unis (130 000), le Royaume-Uni (9 900), l'Italie (3 000), la Pologne (2 350), l'Ukraine (1 650), l'Espagne (1 255) et les Pays-Bas (1 100).

Seize pays avaient envoyé entre 100 et 1 000 hommes : l'Australie, la Roumanie, la Bulgarie, la Thaïlande, le Danemark, la République tchèque, le Honduras, le Salvador, la République dominicai-

ne, la Norvège, la Mongolie, l'Azerbaïdjan, la Hongrie, le Portugal, le Nicaragua, et la Lettonie.

Onze pays avaient envoyé moins de 100 hommes : les Philippines, la Slovaquie, l'Albanie, la Géorgie, la Nouvelle-Zélande, la Croatie, la Lituanie, la Moldavie, l'Estonie, la Macédoine, et le Kazakhstan.

Depuis cette date, la plupart de ces pays se sont retirés d'Irak, à l'exception de six : les Etats-Unis, le Royaume-Uni, l'Australie, la Roumanie, l'Estonie et le Salvador. Ce dernier a annoncé, mardi 23 décembre, un retrait au 31 décembre.

18 December 2008

KURDISHGL **BE**
The first and only English paper in Iraq

Bush praises Barzani's role in Iraq

Bush gives last and sudden visit to Baghdad for meeting Iraqi officials.

By Qassim Khidhir
The Kurdish Globe

Leaders agreed on solving Iraqi problems constitutionally emphasized on the bilateral relations during Bush visit.

Kurdish president, Massoud Barzani and US president, Gorge W. Bush underlined that Iraq's problems should be resolved according to the country's constitution.

Rounding up a farewell trip to the war-torn country President Bush met the Kurdish president in Baghdad. Bush praised Barzani for his support of the US-Iraq agreement, describing him as "a freedom fighter"

"I am happy to see you again in Kurdish clothes," Bush told Barzani who came to the friendly meeting in Kurdish traditional outfit.

Discussing the current problems between Iraqi government and Kurdistan Region both presidents agreed that the problems should be solved according to the country's constitution.

Barzani thanked President Bush and the American people for what he called "librating Iraq from a tyrant."

"War on terror is important for us and the United States, thus we should not let terrorists succeed in Iraq," said President Barzani.

"I am your friend and we will always stand up for you," President Bush concluded. Earlier this year Barzani met with the U.S. President in Washington with Bush giving Barzani a resounding welcome.

At that time both leaders spoke on topics including progress on the election law and on the hydrocarbon law, as well as the status of forces agreement (SOFA). "President Barzani has been a very strong advocate of the Iraqi government passing the SOFA, and I appreciate that," Bush stated.

And while some Iraqi politicians have challenged the U.S.-Iraq security agreement, Iraq's Kurdish leaders have endorsed the pact as essential for U.S. combat troops to continue fighting insurgents in the country.

The visit was Bush's fourth since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

President George W. Bush on Sunday made a farewell visit to Iraq, a place that defines his presidency, just 37 days before he hands the war off to a successor who



U.S. President George W. Bush and Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani meet in Baghdad, December 14, 2008. PRESS PHOTO

has pledged to end it. Air Force One, Bush's distinctive powder blue-and-white jetliner, landed at Baghdad International Airport in the afternoon local time, after a secretive Saturday night departure from Washington and an 11-hour flight.

Aiming to celebrate a new security pact between Washington and Baghdad, the president planned meetings with top

U.S. officials stationed in Iraq as well as with Iraqi leaders.

Bush met with Iraq President Jalal Talabani and his two vice presidents as well as Kurdistan region president at Talabani's palace outside the Green Zone

KURDISHGL **BE**
The first and only English paper in Iraq

18 December 2008

Kurdish forces in Kirkuk and Mosul are part of Iraqi Army

Some Iraqi MPs demand a withdrawal of Peshmarga forces from disputed areas.

By The Kurdish Globe

Spokesman of the Kurdistan Peshmarga, General Jabbar Yawar on Wednesday announced that the Kurdish forces in the Kirkuk and Ninewa provinces are part of the Iraqi army and have no relation with the Peshmarga forces of the Kurdistan Region.

He described those who talk about the Peshmarga's presence in the two provinces as "ignorant about situation in those areas."

Yawar's statement came in reply to a number of the Iraqi parliament members from Ninewa province who announced that the presence of Peshmarga in Mosul was a threat towards the life of people and facilitates irregularities during the upcoming provincial election that will be held by the end of next January.

At a press conference on Wednesday morning, members of parliament, Al-Nujaiifi from the Iraqi bloc, Hanin Qado from the United Iraqi Alliance, and Amin Jajo, a Yazidi member, called on the Iraqi prime minister Nuri Al-Maliki to ask Kurdish



Peshmarga and Asaish (security) forces withdraw from the towns in Ninewa and replace them with forces from the Iraqi defense and interior ministries. The remarked places are within the disputable areas.

"MP Osama Al-Nujaiifi had repeatedly complained about the presence of

Peshmarga forces in Ninewa and Kirkuk provinces and asked the government to pull them out" said Yawar and added, "we explain once again for Al-Nujaiifi and for those who think Peshmarga exist in those provinces that the Kurdish forces in those areas belong to the Iraqi army 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 12th divisions; they have no

administrative or organizing relation with the Peshmarga."

"The Kurds joined the Iraqi army to defend the country's security and gave several victims for achieving this goal," said Yawar who also noted that the Iraqi constitution emphasized on the necessity of founding Iraqi army from all the components.

Regarding the Kurdish Asaish in those provinces, the Kirkuk police Chief General Jamal Tahir admitted the existence of those forces and explained, "The Asaish have come to Kirkuk according to a decree from Kurdistan Region Interior Ministry and they carry out activities under the knowledge of the multinational forces."

"The American forces officially and weekly meet with the Kurdish Asaish in Kirkuk and they visit the Asaish headquarters," said general Tahir who also revealed about a Turkmen parties demand to the Iraqi president Jalal Talabani for outing those forces.

REUTERS

Last South Korean Troops Sent to Iraq Return Home

SEOUL December 19, 2008 (Reuters)

South Korea, which once had the third-largest contingent of foreign soldiers in Iraq, ended its mission there on Friday by bringing home all of the troops it had deployed to the country.

Several hundred South Korean soldiers who had been given a non-combat assignment in a relatively safe Kurdish area of Iraq were greeted by a band and presented with flowers after arriving in Seoul.

The South Korean government earlier this year said it no longer saw the need to keep soldiers there. The government had sent the troops upon the request of its major ally, the United States.

"(The troops) have successfully accomplished their four-year and three-month long mission and have come back to Seoul," the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

South Korea sent 3,600 soldiers to Iraq in 2004 in what was the largest foreign troop deployment after the United States and Britain, but has been rolling back troop levels amid public opposition to the mission.

The past few months have seen a string of departures by U.S. military allies in Iraq as violence subsides and the end of a U.N. mandate authorizing their deployment to the country approaches.

REUTERS

INTERVIEW- Iraqi, Turkish Kurds to hold peace summit-politician

December 19, 2008 - (Reuters) By Hidir Goktas - ANKARA

Kurdish leaders from Turkey and Iraq will hold a peace conference aimed at ending decades of violence by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrilla group, the head of Turkey's pro-Kurdish party said.

Ahmet Turk, leader of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), said the conference, which would take part in Europe or in Iraq, was agreed during a recent trip to northern Iraq, where he met Iraq's President Jalal Talabani and other Iraqi Kurdish leaders.

Turkey, the European Union and United States consider the PKK a terrorist organisation. The group has bases in northern Iraq from where it launches attacks on Turkey in pursuit of an independent Kurdish homeland.

"Kurds will hold a conference and discuss the conditions of a peace process," Turk told Reuters in an interview late on Thursday. "Kurds have to focus on a peace process and put forward a common understanding on the issue."

Turk said the PKK had been invited, but a spokesman for the rebel group in Iraq said it welcomed the conference but it would not attend. Turk did not say when the conference would happen.

The DTP seeks more cultural and political rights for Turkey's Kurds and has insisted a democratic solution should be found. The conference could exert some pressure on the PKK to voice willingness to put down its arms.

Turkey has long complained that Iraq is failing to curb PKK fighters who cross the border to launch attacks against it, but Baghdad and Ankara have recently stepped up contacts to fight Kurdish separatist guerrillas.



AIR STRIKES

The Turkish military has carried out several airstrikes against PKK bases in northern Iraq in recent months as casualties on both sides have risen.

Around 40,000 people have been killed in Turkey since 1984, when the PKK took up arms to establish an ethnic homeland in southeast Turkey.

Turk, whose party faces a possible ban in a court case on charges of links with the PKK, said the ending of what he called discrimination against Kurds in Turkey would encourage the PKK to lay down arms. The Turkish government and the EU have called on the DTP to condemn PKK violence more clearly.

"The problem cannot be solved by (the PKK) resorting to weapons and cannot be solved by operations and force (by the Turkish military). This is a political problem with political solutions," he said.

Tensions between the DTP and the ruling AK Party of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan have risen in recent months ahead of municipal elections in March.

A recent visit by Erdogan to Diyarbakir, the largest city in the restive southeast and a DTP stronghold, was marred by violent protests. The AK Party has boosted local spending to win votes, particularly in the poor southeast.

Turk blamed friction between his party and the AK Party on what he called rising Turkish nationalism.

"We are going through a period of a chauvinistic wave where ethnic nationalism is on the rise. We want a solution based on Turkey's territorial integrity, but the state does not have the same sensitivity with us on the issue." (Editing by Ralph Boulton)

Aswat al-Iraq

December 22, 2008 -

Local officials admit "ethnic conflict" in Ninewa

NINEWA / Aswat al-Iraq: Local officials from different parties and political movements in Ninewa converged that there is an "ethnic conflict" due to the demographic diversity that characterizes the province, where Arabs, Kurds, Chaldo-Assyrians, Shabaks, Yazidis, Turkmen, and Armenians have lived together for hundreds of years.

An official in Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Akram Hormuz, told Aswat al-Iraq that the new elections will outline the grassroots popularity for each party, adding the party that provided most services to the people will be relied on by the man in the street in this stage.

"We wish to have transparent and democratic elections," Hormuz replied when asked about his expectations regarding the forthcoming provincial council elections, scheduled for January 31, 2009.

Salem Korkis, an official in the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), told Aswat al-Iraq that the ongoing conflict in Ninewa is an ethnic one between the Arab and Kurdish blocs.

"The dispute, however, lessened at present due to pressures practiced by the state on the conflicting parties," he said.

He said after the elections, the council will be radically changing and there will be a new balance of power there.

Qusai Abbas Mohammed, the leader of the Democratic Shabak Grouping Party, said the conflict in Ninewa can be described as ethnic-sectarian because the province has a different array of ethnicities, religions and sects.

He expressed belief that there will be a new change in the coming provincial council but there will be no problems to overshadow the voting process.

"The Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) is working actively but it still has a long way to go as far as the issue of Shabaks relocated from Mosul is concerned because so far they were not registered in the IHEC papers," Mohammed said.

Moreover, he added, there is no representation for the Shabaks in the current council, noting the Shabaks in this council represent the parties they belong to.

Fahmi Isahaq, a leading member of the Chaldo-Assyrian Union Party, also agreed in statements to Aswat al-Iraq that the conflict is ethnic, adding "event though the conflict is inter-Christian, it is ethnic in the first place".

Isahaq said that the Assyrians' representative in the council, Ramzi al-Aam Bulus, is marginalized, but there has to be a change in the council in the coming period.

The Washington Post December 20, 2008

Ethnic Divide in Iraqi City a Test for Nation

By Sudarsan Raghavan Washington Post Foreign Service

KIRKUK, Iraq -- Darawan Salahadin, dressed in a black shirt and blue jeans, strolled out of his home in the Kurdish part of his ethnically fragmented neighborhood, passing concrete barriers and a checkpoint guarded by a Kurdish fighter. He entered the Arab section and walked swiftly to his tan, flat-roofed school.

In the classrooms were only Kurdish students. The Arabs would arrive as Kurds left, and then the Turkmen students would get their turn. The school has three names, one in each community's language, and three sets of teachers and principals.

"I have no Arab and Turkmen friends. I have only Kurdish friends," said Salahadin, a slim 17-year-old with thick, gelled black hair. "I can't speak Arabic or Turkmen. So I don't know them."

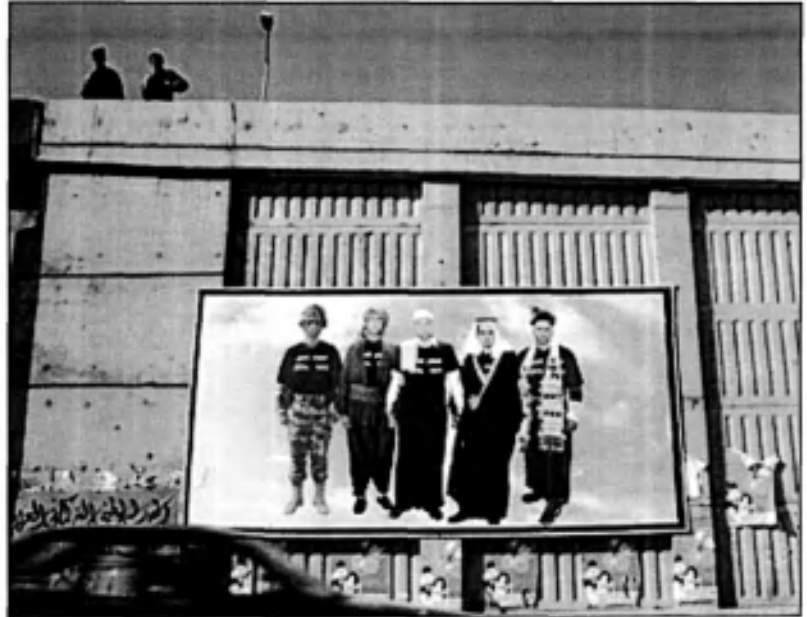
The school's divisions illustrate the tensions rippling through this neighborhood and all of Kirkuk, ground zero of Iraq's most vexing conflict over land, oil and identity. The battle over who will rule Kirkuk is a significant test of whether the Iraqi government can solve the country's internal disputes as the U.S. military draws down.

In contrast to security improvements elsewhere in the country, Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen residents of Kirkuk remain targets of political violence as their leaders vie for control of what they see as their ancestral lands. Last week, at least 57 people died in a suicide bombing on the outskirts of the city, the deadliest assault in Iraq in six months.

"Kirkuk could be the capstone in the house of freedom, or it can be the cheap thread that when you pull out unravels the entire suit," said Lt. Col. David Snodgrass, deputy commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, which oversees the city.

Kurdish political parties, citing historical claims to the city, want to expand their autonomous region in northern Iraq to include it. Iraq's predominantly Arab central government opposes Kurdish control over Kirkuk, whose oil fields produce 40 percent of Iraq's output, as does Kirkuk's minority Turkmen community and its backers in Turkey.

Iraqi leaders and the United Nations are struggling to reach at least a temporary solution to the question of who should control the city. At a time when the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Kurdish leaders are increasingly at odds over the disposition of oil



A poster displays representatives for the Iraqi military, Kurds, Arabs, Christians and Turkmen to try to encourage peace between the cultures in Kirkuk, Iraq. Andrea Bruce-The Washington Post

revenue and other issues, Kurdish parties have deployed forces in the city and the surrounding area in what they say is an attempt to protect Kurdish civilians from attack.

Even the name of Salahadin's neighborhood is contested. Arab and Turkmen residents call it Hay al-Wasiti, as it was known before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The Kurds have renamed it Nowruz, after the Kurdish New Year.

Politics infuses virtually every discussion in this neighborhood -- a sprawling jumble of houses, shops and mosques connected by dusty, unpaved roads in the southern part of Kirkuk. About 120 Kurdish families are clustered inside sand berms, blast walls and checkpoints. Arab and Turkmen houses surround them.

For decades, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen mingled freely, intermarried and ran businesses together. Today, the communities rarely mix.

The separation is not just physical. In geography class, Salahadin learns that Kirkuk is a part of Kurdistan, as Kurds refer to their autonomous region and, more broadly, the independent state they have never had. His favorite subject is Kurdish because, he said, "it is our language," and he studies ancient Kurdish cities and Kurdish heroes.

When he and other Kurdish students leave the school, as the Arabs enter, they greet each

other by saying, "Salaam" -- peace. Then they part ways.

For Arabs, Fear and Doubt

On Nov. 24, across the road from Hay al-Wasiti, a red pickup truck waited over a splatter of fresh blood for a final journey. Forty minutes had passed since a gunman had pumped a single bullet into the head of Khalaf Hamoud al-Jubouri, an Arab lawyer, as he pulled out of his driveway. His daughter found him slumped over the steering wheel.

Now, his body lay inside his dun-colored house, covered with a thick red blanket, awaiting the rituals of burial. His wife and daughters wailed, their anguish piercing the walls.

"Damn the Kurds," screamed one of Jubouri's sons. "I know it was the Kurds who killed my father."

Jubouri, a 58-year-old father of five, worked in the crucible of the conflict, pressing Arab legal claims to disputed lands.

The assassination did not surprise Abid al-Jubouri, an Arab resident of Hay al-Wasiti. "A lot of Arab figures have died in mysterious ways," said Jubouri, a short man with a thin moustache and a serious demeanor who was not closely related to the lawyer.

A former colonel in Saddam Hussein's mili-

tary, Jubouri has lived in the neighborhood since 1995. He is sensitive to Kurdish charges that Arab claims to Kirkuk are illegitimate and that most Arabs in the city arrived as a result of Hussein's efforts to "Arabize" it. "The government gave me the land, because I am originally from Kirkuk," said Jubouri, a father of 11, who owns a real estate agency.

Jubouri sees Kirkuk as a rallying point for Iraqi unity, fearing discrimination if the city were to be placed under Kurdish control. Many of the newly arrived Kurds, he charged, have fake Iraqi identification cards that allow them to vote and receive services.

"The goal is trying to make Kirkuk a Kurdish city," said his son Laith al-Kabi.

"We are completely surrounded by them," added Jubouri. "They control everything."

Many Arabs in the neighborhood have moved to Arab areas or to their villages. This year alone, Jubouri has rented out 20 Arab houses, mostly to Turkmen displaced from Kurdish areas.

Kurds hold senior posts in the police, dominate the city council and have U.S. allies. "If we complain, the Kurds go to the Americans and tell them that those Arabs are terrorists. And Americans come and arrest them," Kabi said.

Kurdish officials said they conduct raids with U.S. troops but only against suspected insurgents, who are mostly Arabs. "We didn't come here to treat anyone unfairly," said Ibrahim Mardan, a senior official of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the political party led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, speaking inside his party's fortified base in the neighborhood.

Senior non-Kurdish police commanders complain that Kurdish intelligence agencies were opening offices in many enclaves, mirroring Hussein's security apparatus.

"We have a law: Any armed group for a specific party should be considered as a militia. So their existence here is illegal. But they have become a reality on the ground," said Maj. Gen. Torhan Yousef Abdul Rahman, Kirkuk's deputy police chief.

His men, he said, cannot even enter the neighborhood to respond to any complaints against Kurds because "they control the area." When asked why not, Abdul Rahman faintly smiled and said, "Political issues."

Jubouri never visits the Kurdish section of his neighborhood. And the tensions have poisoned his relationship with his longtime Kurdish neighbors, whom he calls the "original Kurds."

"I am scared of them. I do not trust them," Jubouri said. "I stay friends with them to protect myself."

Under an orange tree in the courtyard at the dead lawyer's home, two men in white skull caps dipped a white cloth in water and with gentle strokes cleaned his pale, bloodless body.

Jubouri's tribesmen placed the corpse inside a simple black coffin and carried it to the red pickup truck. They drove away, kicking up dust, toward an Arab cemetery.

For Kurds, 'Our Jerusalem'

At one entrance to Nowruz, Kurdish fight-

ers overlook a road dubbed the "roadside bombs" street. On the other side are Arab and Turkmen houses.

"We are surrounded by them," said Salahadin Mahadeen, Darawan's father. Unlike his son, he never crosses the street.

He fled Kirkuk in 1991, after Hussein's forces suppressed a Kurdish uprising in the wake of the Persian Gulf War. For the next dozen years, he lived in the mountain town of Rania in Iraq's northern Kurdish region. On June 20, 2003, Mahadeen arrived here with his family, joining thousands of Kurds who entered Kirkuk after the invasion to claim land they considered theirs.

He said Arabs of the former regime had tortured and killed his father. And his Turkmen neighbors had accused him of supporting the Kurdish resistance, forcing him to flee.

When he returned, the father of five with the thick glasses and gravelly voice occupied the house of a military officer of the government that had forced him to leave Kirkuk.

"It was like being reborn," said Mahadeen, seated on a Kurdish carpet in his living room, sipping sweet tea. Outside, his manicured front lawn gleamed with roses.

In 2006, two massive truck bombs detonated near his house. Flying shrapnel blinded his right eye. Since then, violence has fallen, but persists: Ten days ago mortar shells struck the Kurdish section. "This area was once for Saddam's officers, and now the Kurds live here. That's why they are attacking us," said his wife, Zaitoon Sharif, 43.

Two Arab families still live in their section. Socializing is limited to cordial greetings. "They are Muslims, like us," Mahadeen explained.

"I don't trust them," Sharif said. "They are living among Kurds. So they have to be nice to us. But if they become powerful again, they will treat us differently."

Mahadeen is worried about Maliki's plan to create tribal councils to support the central government, seeing similarities to Hussein's nurturing of Iraq's tribes. "Now, there is a new dictator, but with a different name," said Mahadeen. "He wants to make the Arabs more powerful."

"Kurds lost much blood for Kirkuk -- all what happened under Saddam, the executions, the jail sentences, the rapes, the blood -- all of this was for Kirkuk," Mahadeen said. "If the problem is oil, then we will give them the oil. We want the land."

"How can we live without our Jerusalem, without our heart?"

A few minutes later, a crashing mortar shell shook the windows.

Turkmen Displaced

Abu Amjad al-Najafi, 61, a Turkmen, was sitting in a coffee shop when he heard the news of Khalaf Hamoud al-Jubouri's death. He was a friend, and once lived in Jubouri's area.

In 1983, Hussein's government displaced Najafi and thousands of Turkmen families under the pretext of building a railway station. Their neighborhood was repopulated with Arabs from other parts of Iraq.

"Now, the same policy is happening by the Kurds," said Najafi, tall and broad-faced with a hulking physique.

A Turkmen Shiite, Najafi said he believes the Turkmen are the original residents of Kirkuk. In fact, the Kurdish enclave -- and all of Hay al-Wasiti, he adds -- was owned by Turkmen. "It's all Turkmen land, 100 percent."

Najafi lives near the local office of Kurdish intelligence, across the street from the Kurdish party's base and Mahadeen's house. The street is lined on both sides with concrete barriers. Friends and relatives rarely visit, fearing Kurdish scrutiny.

"If there is tension between Arab and Turkmen against Kurds, or political issues, at the end of the day they are Kurds," said Najafi. "If you make any wrong move, they will kill you right away."

In July, clashes broke out between Kurds and guards of a Turkmen political party after a suicide bomber attacked a rally. Two dozen people died. Najafi stayed locked inside the house for a week.

Najafi asserts his Turkmen identity and proudly claims that some of the greatest philosophers in the Arabic language were Turkmen. He cringes every time he sees a map of Kurdistan, a hot seller in markets here, which portrays Kurdish aspirations: The borders include much of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran.

"We have a saying here: If you give the Kurds Kirkuk, they will claim Iraq," Najafi said. "If you give them Iraq, they will claim the entire Arab world."

"And they want the oil of Kirkuk to establish their future."

He never goes to the Kurdish section across the street. "If they see a stranger, they wouldn't let me in," he said.

He's also wary of some Arabs. "We have terrorists in our neighborhood. Most of them are Arabs," Najafi said. "One day, I might be targeted because I am Shiite."

Kurds 'Will Never Leave'

Abid al-Jubouri and Najafi are not optimistic about the Iraqi government's plans to resolve the impasse over the city. "As long as this central government is weak and the Kurds are stronger than them, nothing will change," Najafi said.

Iraq will hold provincial elections next month, but not in Tamim province, of which Kirkuk is the capital. Kurdish leaders and lawmakers in Baghdad refused to accept a power-sharing deal in Kirkuk that would have allowed the balloting to take place.

"The Kurds are living in a big dream, and this dream is fueled by American forces," Jubouri said. "If Americans withdraw, they will be weakened and leave."

At the Kurdish party's base, fighter Luqman Majid stood sentry near the charred wreckage of a truck used in a 2006 bombing. "They have to walk over our bodies to make us leave this area," Majid said. "We will never leave, even if this place becomes our grave. This is Kurdistan."

TURQUIE: La sécurité d'Etat prend en otage la liberté d'expression

ihсан kurt, de retour de turquie

Informé est une activité suspecte et potentiellement dangereuse lorsqu'elle touche à la question kurde. Les procès se multiplient.

La pression sur les médias a encore augmenté en Turquie. Plusieurs journaux, livres et journaux satiriques ont été interdits. L'accès à Youtube et à un millier de sites a été fermé. Les tribunaux en ont décidé ainsi selon l'article 301 du code pénal intitulé «Humiliation de l'identité turque, de la République, des institutions ou des organes d'Etat». Sous la pression du gouvernement et de l'armée, les lois antiterroriste et sur la protection du père de la nation, Atatürk, sont devenus le cauchemar des journalistes critiques. Selon www.bianet.org, un réseau de communication et de médias créé en 2000 par des journalistes indépendants, les restrictions à la liberté d'expression ont augmenté depuis le début de cette année en Turquie. Pas moins de 194 journalistes ont été interrogés et 79 jugés par la justice turque. Soit 60% de plus que l'année dernière! Ils risquent de six mois à trois ans de prison selon l'article 301 du code pénal qui punit «quiconque humilie ouvertement le gouvernement, les organes de justice de l'Etat, les structures militaires ou policière».

Trente-neuf fermetures

Des sites étranger tels que geocities.com ont également été interdits par la justice. Pour Youtube.com, la décision d'en bloquer l'accès a été prise en juin, suite à la diffusion sur ce site de scènes critiquant Mustafa Kemal, alias Atatürk. Selon Oral Calislar, chroniqueur dans le quotidien de référence Radikal, plusieurs journaux kurdes sont actuellement interdits ou subissent des pressions. Depuis deux ans et

demi seize journaux kurdes ont déjà été fermés trente-neuf fois. Sans aucun procès judiciaire. Les tribunaux ont directement décidé de fermer ces titres. «C'est une exécution extrajudiciaire», accuse le journaliste.

Cette répression touche aussi d'autres milieux intellectuels. La célèbre chanteuse transsexuelle Bülent Ersoy mais aussi les écrivains Perihan Magden, Gökhan Gençay, Ibrahim Cismecioglu, Birgül Ozbaris ou Yasin Yetisgen sont en jugement pour leurs discours de soutien aux objecteurs de conscience et leur opposition à la guerre. A cette longue liste s'ajoute encore l'écrivain kurde Murat Coskun, condamné à 18 mois de prison pour avoir suscité «la haine et l'hostilité» dans son livre sur les problèmes sociaux des femmes intitulé *Le langage féminin de la douleur*.

«Ne pas démoraliser l'armée»

De son côté, l'armée turque qui donne souvent des briefings aux journalistes sur la sécurité et les intérêts nationaux du pays n'aime pas les articles et encore moins les commentaires sur les conflits avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Après une attaque de la guérilla kurde contre une base militaire turque le 15 octobre dernier, le chef d'Etat major Mehmet Ilker Basbug donnait un ultimatum aux médias: «Ceux qui décrivent les actions d'organisations terroristes comme une réussite face à l'armée partageront la responsabilité du sang qui coule et qui va encore couler.» En représailles, le quotidien turc indépendant et critique envers l'armée, Taraf, a été menacé par le chef d'état-major et le premier ministre Erdogan. Le journal kurde gundemonline.com et le quotidien Alternatif ont, eux, été interdits. Pour les géné-

raux, il s'agit de faire passer cette mise en garde aux intellectuels: tout message critique dans les médias aura des conséquences.

Quant au gouvernement de l'islamiste Recep Tayyip Erdogan, il suit l'armée pour des raisons de cohésion nationale et veut éviter de la «démoraliser dans sa lutte contre le terrorisme». Le premier ministre tient souvent les mêmes discours que son «pasha», le chef d'état-major, Ilker Basbug, en considérant la question kurde et les conflits avec la guérilla comme des sujets stratégiques relevant de la sécurité nationale. S'ils s'entêtent, les contrevenants sont très sévèrement punis. Ainsi un journaliste du grand quotidien populaire Hürriyet, plutôt bien vu par les militaires, et deux de ses rédacteurs en chef ont été condamnés en juillet dernier à environ 90 000 francs d'amende pour «démoralisation de l'armée». En cause: un reportage sur la guérilla kurde.

Censure sans frontière

La censure d'Ankara s'applique aussi à la diaspora kurde. Les autorités turques exercent des pressions sur le Danemark et l'Allemagne afin d'interdire les émissions de Roj TV qui diffuse par satellite depuis le Danemark et qui a ses bureaux en Allemagne et à Bruxelles. En juin dernier, l'Allemagne a interdit la diffusion de cette chaîne sur son territoire. Dans le même temps, l'accès au seul quotidien kurde Ozgür Politika, publié à Francfort, est bloqué en Turquie. Si Oral Calislar relève que, contrairement aux années 1990, il n'y a pas eu d'assassinat de journalistes, la censure et l'interdiction des titres kurdes sont bien plus fortes qu'auparavant.

(24)heures

20 Décembre 2008

Irak: le Premier ministre Maliki en Turquie pour évoquer la lutte contre le PKK

ANKARA (AFP)

Le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki était attendu mercredi en Turquie pour une nouvelle visite axée sur la lutte contre les rebelles kurdes turcs retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak.

Accompagné de plusieurs ministres, M. Maliki devait être reçu en fin de matinée par le président Abdullah Gül puis s'entretenir avec son homologue Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Une conférence de presse n'était pas prévue selon le programme officiel turc.

Les deux hommes devaient en outre présider des réunions de comités de coopération.

Le point d'orgue de cette visite, la deuxième de M. Maliki en Turquie depuis son déplacement à Istanbul en novembre 2007 pour une conférence des pays voisins de l'Irak, reste la stratégie de lutte contre les séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Quelque 4.000 rebelles, selon Ankara, se réfugient dans les montagnes de l'Irak du nord et



s'infiltrer en territoire turc pour attaquer les forces de sécurité.

Le mois dernier, l'Irak, la Turquie et les Etats-Unis ont décidé de former un comité chargé d'évaluer la menace du PKK et d'agir pour stopper ses activités.

La Turquie poursuit ses opérations militaires

aussi bien sur son territoire qu'en Irak du nord contre des cibles du PKK, bombardées régulièrement par son aviation depuis un an.

Dans des déclarations mardi à la presse turque, le président irakien Jalal Talabani indiquait que les Kurdes d'Irak se réuniraient prochainement pour appeler les rebelles à "abandonner la lutte armée et rejoindre le processus démocratique".

Selon M. Talabani, lui-même kurde, les liens avec la Turquie ont une importance "stratégique" pour l'Irak. Le PKK "doit se rendre compte qu'il est dans l'impasse", ajoutait le président irakien en demandant parallèlement à Ankara "de faire des gestes pour inciter" les rebelles à déposer les armes.

Ces propos ont été interprétés par les médias turcs comme une démarche visant, à terme, à "dissoudre" le PKK en Irak.

Selon les chaînes de télévision, les factions kurdes et l'administration de Bagdad devraient

bientôt déclarer le PKK hors-la-loi et lui couper toute voie de financement.

La Turquie a décrété plusieurs amnisties limitées pour les rebelles, dont une, en vigueur actuellement, qui exclut ses commandants.

Ankara a accusé les Kurdes irakiens, qui dirigent une administration autonome dans le nord de l'Irak, de tolérer voire d'aider les rebelles.

Suite à un changement de politique depuis début 2008, encouragée par Washington dont

les forces occupent l'Irak depuis 2003, Ankara a accru ses contacts avec l'administration kurde pour résoudre ce problème.

Nouveau signe de ce réchauffement: le président turc a annoncé mardi une visite en Irak pour janvier. Ce déplacement, initialement prévu en décembre, avait dû être reporté par Abdullah Gül pour des raisons de santé.

Considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union euro-

péenne, le PKK s'est lancé depuis 1984 dans une campagne armée en vue d'une autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, majoritairement peuplé de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait 44.000 morts.

Des projets de coopération énergétiques devaient également être au menu des entretiens de mercredi à Ankara, d'où M. Malaki s'envolera jeudi pour sa quatrième visite en Iran depuis sa prise de fonction en 2006.

LE COURRIER 24 Décembre 2008

KURDES ET ARABES SE DISPUTENT LE CONTROLE DE KIRKOUK ET DE MOSSOUL

BORIS MABILLARD

IRAK - Alors que le statut de la ville est toujours en suspens, les rues de Kirkouk ont retrouvé un certain calme. Mais la situation pourrait rapidement dégénérer. A Mossoul, plus au nord du pays, les violences n'ont pas perdu de leur intensité.

Sur la route de Kirkouk, malgré son état lamentable, les voitures foncent à toute allure. Les plus rapides ou les plus kamikazes relient Erbil, la capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, à Kirkouk en une heure à peine, en prenant des risques. Abdulsalam, un chauffeur de taxi, explique: «Avant nous roulions vite parce que la sécurité n'était pas assurée, il ne fallait pas s'attarder. L'habitude étant prise, on a continué à rouler ainsi alors que la sécurité est revenue depuis longtemps. Je fais l'aller et retour plusieurs fois par jour, et presque à chaque trajet je vois un accident grave. La route tue plus que les bombes.» D'autant plus vrai que depuis quelques mois un semblant de calme règne à Kirkouk, faisant naître les espoirs d'une normalisation.

Les flammes des cheminées et les dericks annoncent la cité pétrolière. Au milieu des collines désertiques, une entreprise kurde irakienne construit une nouvelle cité de luxe. Des petites maisons individuelles au milieu d'un immense enclos grillagé et surveillé par les gardes d'une compagnie de sécurité, preuve que certains font de bonnes affaires ici. Les taxis en provenance d'Erbil ne pénètrent pas dans la ville, souvent du temps où se risquer dans Kirkouk pouvait vous coûter la vie. Une vieille bagnole cabossée prend le relais: un gros check-point tenu par l'armée irakienne marque le début de l'agglomération. L'atmosphère est tendue, même effrayante: une partie des militaires sont encagoulés pour ne pas être reconnus, des blocs de béton, des sacs de sable, c'est presque l'état de siège.

Les restes de la guerre

Ce qui choque d'emblée, c'est l'extrême délabrement des infrastructures, des routes cahotantes, des trottoirs défoncés, des carcasses de voitures, des océans de boue au milieu desquels les voitures surnagent à peine. Un chaos misérable et des hommes en armes partout. La guerre est encore toute proche, elle hante

les rues. Salah dirige une entreprise d'électricité, il travaille surtout avec l'armée américaine. Même au pire moment de la guerre, il est resté dans sa ville: «A certains endroits, j'ai eu peur, il y avait des quartiers, des rues, des ronds-points qu'il fallait éviter. En tant que Kurde, je faisais particulièrement attention à certaines zones arabes. Maintenant, je vais partout.» Pas tout à fait, au sud de Kirkouk, dans un des quartiers les plus pauvres, peuplé majoritairement d'Arabes, Salah ne se risque pas, même en voiture.

Une maison cossue abrite la famille de Salah, trois enfants et sa femme qui se promène dehors sans voile. Les voisins sont kurdes, assyriens et turkmènes. Selon Salah, tout le monde vit ici en bonne intelligence, «nous n'avons pas de problèmes entre nous, mais nous ne nous parlons pas beaucoup». En fait, même s'il n'y a pas d'animosité déclarée entre eux, Salah ne parle pas à ses voisins turkmènes: «Ils ont une culture différente, cela rend difficile sinon impossible des rapports plus étroits.» Derrière les mots, on sent le peu d'estime que porte Salah aux autres communautés de la ville, seuls les chrétiens assyriens ont grâce à ses yeux, pour la bonne raison, qu'à son avis, ce sont des Kurdes.

Le quartier où vit Salah est plutôt aisé, cependant entre les maisons spacieuses, des tas d'immondices attirent la vue. Salah accuse les pouvoirs publics de ne rien faire pour améliorer l'environnement urbain, les routes, pour débarrasser les poubelles, pour rétablir l'électricité: «Le KRG (le gouvernement régional kurde, ndr) et le gouvernement de Bagdad ne font rien pour la ville.» Au siège régional du Parti démocratique kurde (PDK) du président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, Najat Manmi justifie l'absence d'investissements: «Le gouvernement irakien refuse de nous donner la ville, il se doit donc d'investir dans les infrastructures. Pour l'instant, officiellement, Kirkouk ne fait pas partie du Kurdistan.» Les deux parties se renvoient la balle, le gouvernement central refusant d'investir de l'argent en raison de la prétention kurde sur ce territoire.

Lutte d'influence

Beaucoup de déplacés parmi lesquels des Kurdes qui avaient été chassés par les sbires de Saddam revien-

ent. Ceux qui ne bénéficient pas de soutien connaissent des jours difficiles. Dans le stade de Kirkouk, un stade immense mais abandonné depuis 2003, 480 familles se sont installées, dans un dénuement absolu. Les vestiaires, les loges, les espaces libres sous les gradins abritent, entre des tentures trouées et des bouts de carton, les déracinés. Il n'y a pas d'eau courante, de toilette, de douche, et l'odeur est à certains endroits insoutenable. Parmi ces démunis, la colère gronde: des familles kurdes originaires de la ville ont été poussées à revenir, on leur avait promis des logements, et puis rien: «Les politiciens se sont moqués de nous, Mam Jalal, (oncle Jalal comme on appelle ici le président irakien Jalal Talabani, ndr) nous a demandé de revenir ici, il nous a promis des maisons.» Kurdes et Arabes tentent de modifier la répartition démographique, pour augmenter leur influence.

La guerre politique que se mènent Bagdad et Erbil a son écho ici, bien concrètement: quand ce ne sont pas les attentats, les bombes et les violences, c'est la manière dont se font les investissements qui reflète les tensions. Chaque camp accuse l'autre de ne pas en faire assez. Le conflit est politique, mais la population en fait les frais, elle est prise en otage. Pourtant, depuis que la fréquence des attentats a diminué, la vie du bazar a presque repris son cours habituel. Au milieu des cris et des boniments, une foule compacte déambule sans cesse. Toutes les communautés se côtoient ici, dans le souk, mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'elles s'entendent bien.

Raissa suit des cours à l'université de Kirkouk, elle se passionne pour les arts de la scène. Ses amis sont kurdes, arabes, turkmènes; elle est assyrienne: «Moi, je m'entends avec tout le monde, à l'université, les étudiants ne parlent pas de politique. Les Kurdes nous acceptent, à condition que nous ne remettons pas en cause leur mainmise sur la ville.» La relative tranquillité se paie par de lourds silences et des compromis.

Les Kurdes ne lâcheront pas

Au mois de juillet, deux locaux du Front turkmène irakien ont été mis à sac par une foule en colère, les gardes ont été molestés ainsi que les employés. Pour Kanaan Shakir Uzeyiragali, un des chefs du

parti, la foule a été pilotée par les politiciens kurdes. «C'est une manière de faire pression. Un vote décisif sur les minorités avait lieu au parlement de Bagdad. Ils ont accusé les Turkmènes de leur barrer la route et pour nous menacer, indirectement, ils ont monté les foules kurdes contre nous à Kirkouk.» Au siège du PDK, la version est différente. Najat Manmi présente ce dérapage regrettable comme une manifestation spontanée qui répondait à des provocations turkmènes.

La situation est tendue entre les Kurdes et les autres communautés. Les Kurdes ne veulent pas voir Kirkouk échapper à leur contrôle. Ils s'inquiètent de voir les Américains abandonner la sécurité au profit de l'armée irakienne. Najat Manmi voudrait privilégier une solution négociée, diplomatique et durable. Toutefois, paradoxalement, il n'est pas prêt à accepter de compromis: «Dans tous les cas, Kirkouk doit faire partie de la région du Kurdistan. Nous n'acceptons aucun compromis sur ce point.» Dans sa voix, il y a comme une menace: «Si Bagdad s'obstine à refuser nos revendications, nous quitterons purement et simplement le gouvernement, et ce sera le chaos en Irak et à Kirkouk. Nous sommes prêts à aller très loin.»

Salah était présent lors du sac des locaux du front turkmène: «J'ai été étonné de voir cette foule de Kurdes avec des armes, j'ai découvert ce jour-là que les Kurdes possèdent des armes illégales.» Et lui aussi d'ailleurs. Dans le dos de son ventilateur, derrière une cloison métallique, il cache un petit arsenal: une quinzaine de grenades à main de fabrication russe, et deux AK47. Ce n'est pas tout, il a encore un pistolet dans sa voiture. «Rien de plus facile que d'acheter des armes illégalement ici.» Les prix sont même dérisoires, Salah passe un coup de téléphone à un revendeur et s'enquiert: «La kalachnikov chinoise ne vaut que 80 dollars, une kalachnikov de fabrication hongroise, 200 dollars, le dernier modèle russe dans son emballage d'origine, tout neuf, vaut 600 dollars. Pour un RPG7, il ne faut compter que 50 dollars.» Les fusils peuvent être disponibles en quelques heures, pour le RPG7, il faut patienter deux ou trois jours, mais interdiction de prendre des photos de la transaction. Les armes illégales seraient partout, selon Salah, même au bazar.

sont des échoppes d'habits, de tapis comme les autres. Sauf, que dans l'arrière-salle, on négocie des armes à feu. Un revendeur est là, il peut fournir des fusils, tous les modèles, des grenades, des RPG mais, soudain, il prend peur: «Je ne peux pas parler avec vous, je suis policier et je risque gros, descendez la rue, il y a une Toyota Land Rover pleine d'armes à vendre.» Impossible de trouver la voiture, mais sur une terrasse dehors, des hommes palabrent en sirotant le thé. Des billets passent d'une main à l'autre, la vente est conclue: ouvertement, pas bien loin des patrouilles militaires, un pistolet et des munitions viennent de changer de propriétaire!

Une étincelle pourrait mettre le feu aux poudres et créer une explosion de violence. Les Kurdes, en cachette, s'y préparent, mais ils ne sont pas les seuls. De leur côté, les factions armées arabes fourbissent leurs armes et attendent une confrontation. Pour l'instant, la sécurité est aux mains des Américains, mais ces derniers parlent de la transférer à l'armée irakienne. Salah voit l'avenir en rouge: «Il faudrait une bonne guerre, pas demain, aujourd'hui, ou le plus vite possible.»

Des fusils sous le manteau

Une des rues du bazar s'est spécialisée dans le commerce d'armes. Ce

LES REBELLES KURDES DOIVENT STOPPER LES ATTAQUES CONTRE TURQUIE ET IRAN (TALABANI)

AFP

ANKARA, 23 déc 2008 (AFP) –

LES KURDES d'Irak sont déterminés à empêcher les rebelles kurdes d'utiliser leur territoire pour lancer des attaques contre la Turquie et l'Iran, a affirmé le président irakien Jalal Talabani, dans un entretien publié mardi par un journal turc.

"Je vais dire les choses très clairement: nous Kurdes irakiens ne laisserons plus des gens armés, issus de n'importe quel groupement kurde, utiliser notre territoire pour attaquer la Turquie ou l'Iran", a déclaré au quotidien Aksam, M. Talabani, en ajoutant: "nous prendrons les mesures nécessaires.

Les Kurdes du nord de l'Irak vont prochainement se réunir et lanceront un appel commun aux rebelles séparatistes pour qu'ils "abandonnent la lutte armée et rejoignent le processus démocratique", a poursuivi M. Talabani, lui-même Kurde.

Le président irakien a toutefois souligné que les Kurdes irakiens ne combattront pas ces rebelles. "Le problème peut être résolu sans des affrontements", a-t-il estimé.

Des centaines de militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), en lutte ouverte contre le gouvernement d'Ankara, et de son organisation soeur

iranienne PJAK sont réfugiés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

Ankara accuse régulièrement les Kurdes irakiens, qui dirigent une administration autonome dans le nord de l'Irak, de tolérer voire d'aider les rebelles.

Selon M. Talabani, les liens avec la Turquie ont une importance "stratégique" pour l'Irak. Le PKK "doit se rendre compte qu'il est dans l'impasse", a ajouté le président irakien en appelant parallèlement le gouvernement turc "à faire des gestes pour inciter" les rebelles à déposer les armes.

Le mois dernier, l'Irak, la Turquie et les Etats-Unis ont décidé la formation d'un comité pour évaluer la menace posée par le PKK et prendre des mesures pour stopper ses activités.

Le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki doit se rendre cette semaine en Turquie et en Iran.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, a lancé depuis 1984 une campagne armée pour obtenir l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, une région peuplée en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait environ 44.000 morts.

LE COURRIER

24 Décembre 2008

Illisu: la Suisse fait barrage

SIMON PETITE

Le jour de Noël 1914, des soldats étaient sortis des tranchées pour fraterniser avec l'ennemi, le temps de bavarder ou d'échanger quelques cadeaux. La trêve de Noël daterait du Moyen-Age quand l'Eglise catholique ordonnait une suspension des combats.

Malheureusement, l'actualité offre peu de répit et le lecteur-auditeur-télé spectateur-

internaute est bombardé des malheurs du monde. Que fallait-il retenir en cette veille de Noël? Quelque chose de pas trop noir pour respecter la trêve des confiseurs? Mais un événement à la fois positif et important s'est imposé. Ouf... On le sentait: la Suisse – tout comme l'Allemagne et l'Autriche – a suspendu son soutien au mégabarrage d'Illisu dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Ankara a 180 jours pour revoir sa copie. Les opposants au bar-

rage exultent. Pour eux, ce délai équivaut à l'arrêt de mort du projet.

Véritable serpent de mer de la politique turque, la construction du barrage d'Illisu pose davantage de problèmes qu'il n'en résout. L'hydraulique a beau être une énergie propre, cela n'autorise pas n'importe quoi. Une fois rempli, le réservoir d'Illisu serait plus vaste que le lac de Neuchâtel. Il affecterait plus de 50 000 personnes. Les expropria-

tions ont déjà commencé et elles ne se passent pas comme promis aux bailleurs de fonds. Sûrement davantage coutumier de la langue de bois, un diplomate allemand a résumé la situation: «On se fiche de nous.»

Ajoutons que les déplacements de populations kurdes sont loin d'être les seuls aspects problématiques du projet et on comprendra aisément les réticences des écologistes et des organisations d'aide au développement. La Suisse a fini par se rendre à l'évidence. Si le retrait helvétique se

confirme, ce sera la première fois que Berne retire une garantie à l'exportation.

Cet instrument est controversé. En effet, la caution de l'Etat permet à des entreprises de s'embarquer dans des projets risqués. Pour une fois, les autorités posent des conditions sociales et environnementales. Après les milliards débloqués gratuitement pour sauver l'UBS, les quatre sociétés suisses qui devaient participer au chantier d'Illisu ont aujourd'hui de quoi se sentir flouées.

Un marché de quelque 225 millions de francs est en train de s'envoler. Les entrepreneurs suisses ont toujours dit qu'ils risquaient d'être remplacés par des concurrents, comme les Chinois, beaucoup moins regardants sur le relogement des déplacés ou la préservation des sites archéologiques. Si on cherche bien, il y a toujours pire que soi. Faut-il pour autant accepter toutes les compromissions?



IRAK: LE VICE-PREMIER MINISTRE BARHAM SALEH CRAINT UN CONFLIT ARABO-KURDE

BAGDAD, 30 déc 2008 (AFP) –

LE VICE-PREMIER ministre irakien Barham Saleh met en garde, dans un entretien avec l'AFP, contre les "tentatives malveillantes et dangereuses" de transformer les problèmes économiques et politiques de l'Irak en un conflit entre Bagdad et le Kurdistan irakien.

M. Saleh a également critiqué les faibles progrès accomplis dans l'augmentation des exportations pétrolières malgré les huit milliards de dollars injectés dans le secteur au cours des trois dernières années.

"Il y a des tentatives malveillantes et dangereuses de transformer les problèmes économiques et politiques à Bagdad sur un certain nombre de sujets en un conflit arabo-kurde", a déclaré le vice-Premier ministre.

"Il y a des oppositions au sein du gouvernement sur la manière de gérer différents sujets politiques et économiques, comme le problème de Kirkouk, les zones disputées, et aussi la loi sur le pétrole et le gaz", a ajouté ce membre du groupe politique de l'Alliance kurde.

Les trois provinces kurdes irakiennes (Erbil, Dohouk et Souleimaniyah) ainsi que celle de Kirkouk ne prendront pas part aux élections provinciales qui se tiendront dans les 14 autres provinces du pays le 31 janvier.

Riche en pétrole, la province de Kirkouk, qui compte 900.000 habitants, a une population ethniquement mélangée (Arabes, Kurdes et Turcomans), mais les Kurdes ont demandé qu'elle soit rattachée à leur région autonome, dans le nord du pays, ce que refuse Bagdad.

Par ailleurs, le vote d'une loi sur le pétrole a été reportée par le Parlement à

plusieurs reprises du fait d'oppositions farouches entre factions chiites, sunnites et kurdes sur le partage des revenus issus du pétrole.

"Nous avons investi huit milliards de dollars dans le secteur pétrolier au cours des trois dernières années, et les exportations de pétrole se situent toujours autour de 1,8 million de barils par jour, au lieu de 3 millions", a déploré M. Saleh.

Avant l'invasion américaine de mars 2003, les exportations s'élevaient à près de 3 millions de barils par jour. Et dans les années 1980, l'Irak, membre fondateur de l'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole (Opep), exportait 3,4 millions de barils par jour.

Barham Saleh n'a pas donné son sentiment sur ce qu'il était advenu de l'argent investi dans le pétrole, mais l'Irak se retrouve systématiquement dans le trio de tête du classement des enquêtes internationales sur la corruption.

L'Irak a des réserves estimées à 115 milliards de barils, les troisième au monde après l'Arabie Saoudite et l'Iran.

Mais, à cause d'installations vétustes et d'un manque d'investissements, le pays ne produit que 2,18 millions

de barils par jour, dont 1,6 million sont exportés, selon des chiffres de l'Opep.

Le ministre irakien du Pétrole Hussein Chahrstani a lancé un plan visant à tripler les exportations de pétrole, à 6 millions de barils par jour, d'ici 2018.

Les Irakiens sont optimistes sur leur capacité à attirer des investisseurs étrangers dans leur industrie pétrolière, grâce à une relative amélioration de la sécurité dans ce pays ravagé par cinq années de guerre.



IRAK: ARRESTATION DE HUIT INSURGÉS KURDES LIÉS À DES EXTRÉMISTES SUNNITES (ARMÉE)

SOULEIMANIYEH (Irak), 30 déc 2008 (AFP) –

HUIT INSURGÉS kurdes soupçonnés d'être liés à un groupe extrémiste sunnite et de préparer des attentats dans le nord de l'Irak ont été arrêtés dans la province kurde de Souleimaniyah, a indiqué mardi un responsable des forces irakiennes de sécurité.

"Les forces kurdes de sécurité, en coopération avec d'autres forces de sécurité, ont pu arrêter un groupe de huit terroristes", a déclaré le général Hassan Nouri, commandant des forces de sécurité de Souleimaniyah, la capitale d'une des trois provinces du Kurdistan irakien.

"Les membres du groupe sont tous Kurdes et sont liés au groupe terroriste Ansar al-Islam. Ils ont avoué avoir l'intention de perpétrer des attentats", a ajouté le général Nouri.

L'officier irakien a affirmé que le groupe avait planifié des attaques impliquant l'utilisation de bombes magnétiques --des engins explosifs qui peuvent être facilement fixés sous le châssis de véhicules-- contre des responsables irakiens, ainsi que l'emploi de "produits toxiques".

"Nous avons confisqué des cartes et des explosifs", a-t-il précisé.

Souleimaniyah, située à 365 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, près de la frontière iranienne, est administrée par les Kurdes et fait partie de la région autonome

du Kurdistan.

Le groupe kurde Ansar al-Islam est un mouvement d'insurrection extrémiste sunnite qui a revendiqué plusieurs attaques contre les forces irakiennes et américaines. Les Etats-Unis le considèrent comme un mouvement terroriste.

Ansar al-Islam, opposé à la présence de troupes américaines en Irak, est en conflit avec l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan, du président irakien Jalal Talabani, et avec le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan de Massoud Barzani, qui dirige le gouvernement régional kurde.

Le général Nouri a ajouté que les huit hommes avaient été arrêtés dans la région de Khourmal. Cette partie de la province de Souleimaniyah a été à plusieurs reprises un sanctuaire pour le groupe armé avant l'invasion américaine de mars 2003.

Par ailleurs, lors d'une autre opération mardi à Rabia, à l'ouest de Mossoul, l'une des villes les plus dangereuses d'Irak, les forces irakiennes ont capturé trois rebelles présumés, a annoncé l'armée américaine.

"Les individus sont soupçonnés d'avoir extorqué de l'argent aux civils et aux commerçants et de l'avoir transféré à d'autres cellules terroristes locales", a précisé l'armée américaine.

Deep divide

By Micah Garen and Marie-Hélène Carleton

On the slow descent into the Tigris valley, steep cliff walls rise 100 metres on both sides at the confluence of seven natural gorges. The winding road continues into the Kurdish heartland of south-east Turkey until the Mesopotamian plain unfolds, revealing the first scattering of rock caves, of which there are thousands in the area. On the southern bank of the Tigris the ancient settlement of Hasankeyf overlooks the scene.

The town's history dates back at least 7,000 years, with traces of Assyrian, Roman, Byzantine, Artuqid, Ayyubid and Ottoman civilisations. Though dilapidated from years of neglect, Hasankeyf still enchants – fish seem to jump into the nets of fishermen, storks roost on the peaks of ancient minarets. It is fitting that they nest here: Kurdish children learn that storks, leg leg in Kurdish, come from the south, the direction of Mecca and Medina, and so are referred to as hajis – one who has made the pilgrimage – or haji leg leg.

But 80km downstream from Hasankeyf – which means “rock fort” from the Arabic hisn, rock, and keyfa, fort – lies a very serious threat to its future. At the village of Ilisu, a huge dam is being planned and constructed by the Turkish government. When the project is finished, Hasankeyf will be inundated, submerging thousands of years of history.

Abdulvahap Kusen, the mayor of Hasankeyf, sits in his small, modern office watched over by a poster of Kemal Atatürk. “It is like having cancer,” he says. “They keep telling you that you are going to die. You get used to the idea so you don't do anything.”

“Everyone thinks they are going to build a dam, so nobody wants to invest anything,” he continues. “We couldn't change this cultural richness to economic richness. Instead of destroying cultural places for energy which can last 50 or 60 years, you can make money from them.”

At one point the mayor moved his office to a cave in symbolic protest. “Since the beginning of this project, no one from the people living here is involved. We always face trouble when we try to get information about the project. We have not been informed by the officials.”

The construction of the Ilisu dam, Turkey's second largest hydroelectric dam, has gone largely unnoticed in the international media. This despite the fact that the project, backed by €1.2bn of European funding, will displace tens of thousands of civilians, cause significant environmental impact, flood one of the most important archaeological sites in the area and inflame Kurdish separatists.

The dam consortium, led by Turkish and European companies, says

that only 20 per cent of the wider Hasankeyf area will be flooded, including the caves. Professor Abdusselam Ulucam, head of excavations at Hasankeyf, says that is not the case: “Eighty per cent will be flooded, only 20 per cent will remain.” The dam consortium plans to move nine major monuments to a nearby hilltop, including the foundations of an extraordinary 7th century AD Artuqid bridge, creating an Ozymandian vision of two vast and trunkless legs of stone in the desert. Ulucam believes that the major monuments of Hasankeyf cannot be moved without destroying them. The rock, he says, is too fragile.

The Ilisu project has become a flashpoint in a battle of energy versus conservation, modern development versus social preservation, and the political struggle of the Kurds. Proponents see the 1,200 megawatt project as an answer to Turkey's energy needs, providing a renewable energy source – 3 per cent of Turkey's current capacity – and bringing development and stability to the south-east. Opponents see it as a short-sighted effort to harvest energy at the expense of precious cultural resources, the environment and the local population. Some see it as a blatant attack on Kurdish society.

“The Arabs have oil, we have water,” says Yunus Bayraktar, an engineer at the Turkish construction company Nurol and the architect of the current Ilisu dam project, paraphrasing the previous Turkish prime minister, Suleyman Demirel. Bayraktar sees himself as a saviour of an otherwise destitute part of Turkey. “This project will be an economic bomb,” he says. According to the dam consortium, up to half a million people will benefit from the project, though it promises only 4,000 jobs for villagers during the seven years of construction.

As for the ancient ruins of Hasankeyf, according to Bayraktar, they are destined to be destroyed through neglect anyway. “You have to flood Hasankeyf to save it,” he says, looking over plans for a new cultural park that will be created from salva-

ged monuments. Like Fitzcarraldo, in the Werner Herzog film of that name, Bayraktar imagines dragging the remains of the massive bridge, his Molly Aida, up the hill for the benefit of tourists who will flock to the area. “This is my dream,” he says.

The Ilisu dam is not a new problem. The idea was conceived in the early 1950s, but did not gain momentum until the 1970s, when it became part of the massive GAP (South Eastern Anatolian) project to build 22 dams.

In the late 1990s, the Ilisu dam contract was awarded to the British company Balfour Beatty, but it pulled out of the project in 2000 due to strong international opposition to the flooding of Hasankeyf. Many thought that was the end of it. But in 2004, Ilisu was revived under a new consortium led by Austrian, German and Swiss export credit agencies (ECAs), government-backed bodies which provide loans and insurance.

“It's really like a bad Hollywood horror movie” says Bruce Rich, co-director of the international programme at Environmental Defense Fund. “Bad projects do have a remarkable way of coming to life again.”

The issue that has raised the most questions, even more than the impact on Hasankeyf, is the plight of local villagers. Almost 200 villages will be partially or wholly flooded and some non-governmental organisations estimate that up to 80,000 people could be displaced or disrupted (the consortium puts forward lower figures of between 15,000 and 54,000). Local people, who live off farming and animal husbandry, will lose their homes, land and source of income.

Previous dam projects in Turkey have had severe consequences. Displaced villagers had to wait years for compensation and others were forced to move to shanty towns on the outskirts of major cities, with no hope of jobs. The export credit agencies currently involved have put pressure on the Turkish government to ensure that similar problems do not happen again. One hundred and fifty “terms of reference” have been drawn up for the



project. These requirements attempt to mitigate the negative impacts caused by the dam and bridge the gap between Turkish law and World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development standards.

In order to ensure compliance with these terms, the ECAs hired a Committee of Experts to conduct periodic reviews of the process. The committee is made up of both international and Turkish experts in the areas of archaeology, resettlement policy and the environment.

Robert Zwahlen, the committee's chairman, is clear about the limits of his role: “No dam in the world has been built that doesn't change things. The question is, ‘Does society accept these changes or not?’”

Muammer Yasar Ozgul, president of the GAP project, settles into a plush chair in a large, quiet office in Ankara. He exudes the forbearance of a practised bureaucrat. “You can not find one villager who does not support the dam,” he says. In two weeks researching the story, visiting half a dozen villages and speaking to more than 50 villagers, we found only two proponents of the Ilisu dam. One was Choban Ahmet, a shepherd who carries a business card.

“Have you spoken to Choban Ahmet?” Ozgul asks, a refrain we heard from most officials concerned with the Ilisu project.

We met Ahmet at Hasankeyf. “This is how we used to live,” he said, looking sadly at the cold stone walls of a small cave. In the 1970s the prime minister of Turkey visited the region, saw that people such as Ahmet lived in caves, and decided that these dwellings did not befit a modern country. The people were moved to newly constructed houses nearby.

From a plastic architect's tube, Ahmet excitedly unrolled the future: development maps of the region, the proposed archaeological park, and the new village of Hasankeyf. He pointed out where a new open-air museum and amphitheatre would be, and the giant lake which would spur tourism and water sports, including sculling, scuba diving and water skiing.

Ahmet was eager that we see Hasankeyf's current failings, such as open sewer lines that run through the city. There is also a complete lack of infrastructure to harness the town's tourism potential. Although an estimated 500,000 tourists come here every year, they are shuttled in and out on tour buses. The only lodging is the more-than-modest Hasankeyf Motel, which doesn't have running water. As Yunus Bayraktar of Nurol put it: “They look, they drink a Coke, and they leave.”

Ahmet once had dreams of opening a bed and breakfast in the caves that used to be his home. But when he applied for a permit, he was denied by

the state. Pressed on the apparent contradictions – that the state had helped create the depressed economic conditions in Hasankeyf by not investing in it or allowing local development, and had already promised him better housing before – he became agitated: “What choice do we have? Show me another plan. This is our only hope for a better life.”

Eighty kilometres downstream at Ilisu, work on the dam has already begun. The village is home to approximately 270 people and sits perched at the edge of the Tigris. As women bake their daily bread in communal earthen ovens, large diesel diggers scoop buckets of dirt in preparation for an elaborate security compound, the first step before construction of a water diversion tunnel can begin this spring.

One Nurol employee, a former army commander, offered us tea and freshly cooked fish sandwiches. Like many of the people working for the consortium, he is hardened to controversy surrounding the dam: “Are you here to shout ‘No dam! No dam!’” he asks playfully, adding: “If Hasankeyf is flooded, so what? Then they can have underwater archaeology.”

The local gendarmerie, a fixture at the entrance and exits of almost all Kurdish villages in south-east Turkey, gave us permission to film the village and to interview the muhtar, or head of the village. They warned us to be quick.

The muhtar, careful to answer our questions in Turkish not Kurdish, said that people support the dam, and that it will bring jobs and energy to his villagers, half of whom are unemployed. Walking through Ilisu village, one hears a different story.

“We don’t want the dam,” said a

group of elderly men almost in unison as the muhtar looked on sheepishly. “The village has been good for us for thousands of years, why would we want to leave?” Much of the land around the village, and the village itself, has already been expropriated, and residents complain about the poor compensation they received for their houses. When asked about the promise of jobs, they were dismissive: “There won’t be jobs, they will bring in others to do the work.”

Down the road, as smoke billows from the communal oven, a woman preparing bread repeats the Kurdish phrase we hear often, “me baraj nave” (we don’t want the dam). We press her on why the muhtar says otherwise. She looks at him and shakes her head: “Poor muhtar, he knows nothing.” “Focus on the bread,” he admonishes her.

In south-east Turkey, a region that Turkish officials refer to as a “terror area”, many people believe that the Ilisu dam is being built to combat Kurdish rebels. “It’s just to bring an end to the Kurds,” claims a middle-aged woman at the village of Kesme Kopru III, just across the Tigris from Hasankeyf. She says her husband had recently been released after more than nine years in Diyarbakir prison. “If you can’t catch a fish,” her husband says, “you drain the sea.”

The dam site is 45km from the Iraqi border, and near “Hell’s Valley”, famously named for mountainous corridors used by Kurdish fighters. “The main reason is the security phobia of the state,” says Ayla Akat, a member of the Turkish parliament representing the pro-Kurdish DTP party, at the Kurdish cultural centre in downtown Batman, the oil boom town

30km from Hasankeyf. “It is a cultural massacre.”

The governor of Batman, Recep Kizilcik, appointed by the state, is more politically cautious but no less direct. “Concerning security, building up this Ilisu dam is very important for us. It is crucial for our administration.” He pointed to previous examples, including the Ataturk dam. “After the building up of the reservoir of the Ataturk dam, the terrorists couldn’t pass through.”

One only has to travel six hours west of Hasankeyf to catch a glimpse of what many villagers fear is their likely future in the Tigris valley. Along the Euphrates, just north of the Birecik dam, lies the ancient Roman site of Zeugma, submerged along with dozens of villages including Belkis.

The Birecik dam was both a hydro-electric and irrigation project with great promises of development and prosperity. Eight years later, villagers find it difficult to point to anything positive that has happened in the region. “People are so poor here they can not even afford to buy a bunch of parsley,” say a group of mostly Turkish villagers living in the “new Belkis”, a collection of concrete houses overlooking the dam. “Belkis became a village for pensioners. You cannot survive because there is no land to work on.”

Further on, the story is the same. Just north of Halfeti sits the ghost village of Savasan Koyu, marked by the minaret of its flooded mosque eerily rising out of the water. Though all the houses are abandoned, Mehmet Ali, 42, comes every day by donkey to run a tea-house for the occasional visitor to the sunken minaret. He says he is too old to learn another job. “The reason they built the

dam is maybe for irrigation or energy, but they don’t care about anyone who is damaged or suffering. They didn’t employ anyone. What benefit did it bring us?”

The Committee of Experts visited Ilisu and Hasankeyf for the first time in December. Their reports were made public this month. The controversial Ilisu experiment appears now to be in jeopardy. The Turkish government has not met all of the agreed deadlines. The experts found significant problems, particularly in the area of resettlement. There is no full income restoration plan and grievance mechanism as required, villagers were not properly informed, and there has not been a proper archaeological survey or environmental plan.

Turkey, meanwhile, is moving forward. In January, it moved to draw down the first 15 per cent of the financing, €180m, which comes from commercial banks.

While Yunus Bayraktar dreams of the Ilisu dam and Choban Ahmet dreams of a new Hasankeyf, Nusret Ozdimer, a villager from Belkis displaced eight years ago by the Birecik dam, dreams of his old life. “When we dream, all our dreams are about the village.”

Before the flood

For a slideshow and documentary video, including interviews with villagers in Ilisu and Hasankeyf, Turkish officials, the Ilisu dam consortium and the European export credit agencies, go to www.ft.com/turkishda



December 22, 2008 -

Jalal Talabani meets Arab bloc in Kirkuk, the bloc demands division of authority

KIRKUK, Iraq's border with Kurdistan region, — Iraqi President Jalal Talabani received a delegation from the Arab bloc in Kirkuk to discuss its demands, a close media source said on Monday.

“Talabani today received in Kirkuk a delegation from the Arab bloc in the province,” the source told VOI.

“The aim of the meeting is to discuss the latest political developments in Kirkuk, www.ekurd.net in addition to the bloc’s demands,” he added.

Talabani arrived in the city of Kirkuk on Sunday to resume talks he held last week with political blocs and forces in the province.

Iraqi President : Jalal Talabani, a Kurd

Arab bloc demands division of authority in Kirkuk

The Arab Bloc in Kirkuk on Monday called on President Jalal Talabani to divide local authority among the province’s constituents, www.ekurd.net to an informed media source.

“During its meeting with Talabani today, the Arab Bloc submitted a list of demands, the most prominent of which is a division of authority among the province’s constituents,” the source said.

Talabani is expected to meet with local chieftains later today, the source noted, providing no further details.

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call “the Kurdish Jerusalem.”

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas.

The article also calls for conducting a census to be followed by a referendum to let the inhabitants decide whether they would like Kirkuk to be annexed to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region or having it as an independent province.

The former regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had forced over 250,000 Kurdish residents to give up their homes to Arabs in the 1970s, to “Arabize” the city and the region’s oil industry.

In Turkey, the test of wealth

Muslims' success in business seen as temptation to excess

By Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: Turkey's religious businesspeople spent years building empires on curtains, candy bars and couches. But as observant Muslims in one of the world's most self-consciously secular states, they were never accepted by elite society.

Now that group has become its own elite, and Turkey, a more openly religious country. It has lifted an Islamic-inspired political party to power and helped make Turkey the seventh-largest economy in Europe.

And while other Muslim societies are wrestling with radicals, Turkey's religious merchant class is struggling instead with riches.

"Muslims here used to be tested by poverty," said Sehminur Aydin, an observant businesswoman and the daughter of a manufacturing magnate. "Now they're being tested by wealth."

Some say religious Turks are failing that test. They see the recent economic crisis as a lesson for those who indulged in the worst excesses of consumption, summed up in the work of one Turkish interior designer: a bathroom with faucets encrusted with Swarovski crystal, a swimming pool in the bedroom, a couch rigged to rise up to the ceiling by remote control during prayer. "I know people who broke their credit cards," Aydin said.

But beyond the downturn, no matter how severe, is the reality: the religious wealthy class is powerful now in Turkey, a new phenomenon that poses fresh challenges not only to the old secular elite but to what good Muslims think about themselves.

Money is at the heart of the changes that have transformed modern Turkey. In 1950, Turkey was a largely agrarian society, with 80 percent of its population living in rural areas. Its economy was closed and foreign currency was illegal. But a forward-looking prime minister, Turgut Ozal, opened the economy. Now the country exports billions of

dollars in goods to Europe, and about 70 percent of its population lives in cities.

Religious Turks helped power that

rise, yet for years they were shunned by elite society. That helps explain why many are engaged in such a frantic effort to prove themselves, said Safak Cak, a Turkish interior designer with many wealthy religious clients. "It's because of how we labeled them," he said. "We looked at them as black people."

Cak was referring to Turkey's deep class divide. An urban upper class, often referred to as White Turks, wielded the political and economic power in the country for decades. They saw themselves as the transmitters of the secular ideals of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Turkey's founder. They have felt threatened by the rise of the rural religious merchant class, particularly of its political representative, the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"The old class was not ready to share economic and political power," said Can Paker, chairman of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, a liberal research organization in Istanbul. "The new class is sharing their habits, like driving Mercedeses, but they are also wearing head scarves. The old class can't bear this."

Paker described the White Turks' thinking this way: "They were the peasants, why are they among us?"

Aydin, who wears a scarf, encountered that attitude not long ago in one of Istanbul's fanciest districts. A woman called her a "dirty fundamentalist," when Aydin tried to put trash the woman had thrown out her car window back inside.

"If you're driving a good car, they stare at you and point," said Aydin, 40. "You want to say, 'I graduated from French school just like you,' but after a while, you don't feel like proving yourself."

She does not have to.

Her father started by selling curtains. Now he owns one of the largest home appliance makers in Europe. Aydin grew up wealthy, with tastes no different from the older class. She lives in a sleek, modern house with a pool in a gated community. Her son attends a prestigious private school. A business school graduate, she manages about 100 people at a private hospital founded by her father. Her head scarf bars her from

employment in a state one.

Her husband, Yasar Aydin, shrugged. "Rich people everywhere dislike newcomers," he said. In another decade, those prejudices will be gone, he said.

The business owners describe themselves as Muslims with a Protestant work ethic, and say hard work deepens faith.

"We can't lie down on our oil like Arab countries," said Osman Kadiroglu, whose family owns a large candy company in Turkey, with factories in Azerbaijan and Algeria. "There's no way out except producing."

Ismail Kavurmaci, an observant Muslim who owns a Cerruti store, said Islam teaches that "nobody likes an idle man."

Fortunes were made, forming new patterns of consumption. Istanbul, Turkey's economic capital, is No. 4 on the latest Forbes list of world cities with the highest number of billionaires. Luxury cars stud its streets. Shopping malls, 80 at last count, are mushrooming.

"Now, unfortunately, there is a taste for luxury, excessive consumption and comfort, vanity, exhibitionism and greed," said Mehmet Sevket Eygi, a 75-year-old newspaper columnist who has written extensively about Muslims and wealth.

Recep Senturk, a sociologist at the Center for Islamic Studies in Istanbul, said: "You have money, but do you buy whatever you want? Or should you keep a humble life? This is a debate in Turkey right now."

Islam forbids consuming more than one needs, but the line is blurry, leaving rich Muslims struggling with questions like whether luxury cars can be offset by large donations to charity, a central tenet of Islam.

Donations to Deniz Feneri, one of the largest charities in Turkey, jumped almost a hundredfold in the six years ending in 2006, when they topped \$62 million. A large part of the donations came from credit cards on the Internet.

Aydin, for her part, supports 25 families, even though she moved out of their neighborhood two years ago. The real problem is not finding a place to pray on a busy day out (mall fitting rooms work), but being truly charitable and putting others first in an age when the frenzied pace of life pushes in the opposite direction.

Even house designs take charity into account. Cak described a multimillion-dollar house whose design included an industrial-size kitchen where food was cooked daily and distributed in trucks throughout the neighborhood of Umraniye.

"It's the way to find peace in your heart after spending so much money," Cak said. "I'm putting gold in my floor, but I'm feeding all these people."

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting.



Osman Kadiroglu, whose family owns a big candy company, at home with his wife, Ferhan, and their child, Ayse, in Istanbul. Islam's stance on wealth is a hot topic today.

Iraqi factions struggling for power in post-U.S. era

By Alissa J. Rubin

With provincial elections scheduled for the end of January, Iraq appears to be plagued by political troubles that seem closer to Shakespearean drama than to nascent democracy.

There is talk of a coup against the prime minister. The speaker of Parliament has abruptly resigned, making angry accusations on his way out the door. And there have been sweeping arrests of people believed to be conspiring against the government, both in Baghdad and Diyala Province, northeast of the capital.

Beneath the swirl of accusations and rumors is a power play in which different factions within the government — and some outside it — are struggling to gain ground as American influence in the country wanes and elections approach that could begin to reshape the political landscape here.

The real struggle is for the country's identity: how much the government will be controlled from Baghdad and how much from the provinces, who will hold power and who will have to give it up.

The American mantra has been that Iraq remains "fragile" — to use the words of Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus. On the political front, that seems especially true. The one source of political unity recently has been frustration with Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, who has been making arrests and using tribes in the provinces to set up personal power bases. His rivals, conscious of Iraq's long history of dictatorship, are crying foul.

"Maliki is monopolizing all the political, security and economic decisions," said Omar Abdul Sattar, a prominent Sunni member of Parliament.

He listed political parties that he said were turning against the prime minister, including a powerful Shiite party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. The council is fighting Maliki's drive to centralize power in Baghdad and pushing to give more to the provinces, where the party has

important power bases, particularly in the south.

"It's simply the story of the transformation from a democratic prime minister into a dictator," Sattar said.

Fresh in people's minds is the recent detention of 24 employees of the Interior Ministry in Baghdad, and possibly more from other ministries, who, according to some reports, were plotting a coup.

Maliki's office vehemently denied that this was the reason for the detention. In any case, the detentions of at least some of the 24 were politically motivated, said several senior Iraqi government officials.

In Diyala Province, about 50 people were detained three weeks ago at a rally protesting the detention of a local Sunni political leader. Ten were members of the Iraqi Islamic Party, a leading Sunni party that Shiite parties in Diyala suspect of having some links to Sunni insurgents and would like to hobble.

Equally controversial is Maliki's project to form tribal councils that have a direct relationship with his office and are paid from his budget. The groups, known as support councils, are being created both in predominantly Shiite and predominantly Sunni areas.

Their mandate is vague, but conversations with members suggest that they are a way to bring powerful tribes into Maliki's political orbit so that he has a local power base. Maliki's Dawa Party is not particularly influential in the provinces, unlike the parties of some of his rivals.

Deep resentment at these attempts to bolster his power and especially his exclusion of all but a small inner circle from decision making is prompting serious discussion of forcing Maliki out by holding a no-confidence vote in Parliament. A no-confidence vote removes the prime minister and requires the appointment of a new one.

In 2007, a previous effort to depose Maliki failed, but this time the talk seems more serious.

About two weeks ago, the leaders of the major political factions in the government met in northern Iraq to discuss Maliki and whether they could muster the votes to get rid of him, according to high-ranking Iraqi politicians and Western diplomats.

"We have been counting the votes, and we have enough votes to withdraw confidence and nominate a new prime minister," said a senior member of the United Iraqi Alliance, a coalition of Shiite parties and independents that forms the largest bloc in Parliament.

What they do not have, however, is agreement on who would get the top

jobs, which the parties want to nail down before making any moves.

The parties' concerns with Maliki vary.

The Sunni parties mostly feel distrusted, slighted and left out of decision making. Many Sunnis remain in detention despite an amnesty law that was supposed to result in the release of thousands from Iraqi jails.

The Kurds are furious that despite promises from Maliki and his government, there has still not been a vote on whether the disputed areas in the north, including Kirkuk, should become part of the Kurdistan region. They are also upset that Maliki has been rallying Arabs in the north against them, trying to shift the political balance of power. But if Maliki agrees to some of their demands — especially for a referendum on Kirkuk — they might fare better with him than against him.

Among his fellow Shiites there is a more complicated dynamic. Some parties, like the Supreme Council, agree with the Kurds' desire to have strong provincial powers, in part to curtail the power of the central government. But other Shiite groups, like those aligned with the anti-American cleric Moktada al-Sadr, are wary of granting more power to the provinces because they have a vision of a national Iraqi identity bolstered by a strong central government.

The former speaker of Parliament, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, who resigned this past week, accused Maliki's rivals of pushing him out to make a no-confidence vote easier.

"They are hoping that after my resignation, it will be easier for them to dismiss Maliki," he said Tuesday.

A vote of no confidence, however, would not be a coup; it would in fact be a democratic, orderly way to change the government.

But unless there is consensus about a successor, the government could drift as it did after the elections in 2005, when there were several months of discussions about who would become prime minister, and in 2006, when the previous prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, was removed.

There is another problem: The very qualities that lawmakers resent in Maliki — strong-arm tactics combined with efforts to reach out to select local constituencies — have enhanced his profile on the Iraqi street.

The question is, will they do better by sticking with him or forcing him out?

December 22, 2008

Turkey urged by EU official to reform

Steps needed, he says, to show it is serious

By Ingrid Melander

Reuters

BRUSSELS: Turkey must overcome internal divisions and get back to long-delayed reforms early next year to show it is serious about wanting to join the European Union, the bloc's enlargement commissioner, Olli Rehn, said in an interview.

Rehn also said he expected more Balkan countries to apply for EU membership following Montenegro's move earlier this month, but he urged them not to rush in because they must first show a track record of reform.

He warned EU hopefuls in Southern and Eastern Europe not to take the financial crisis as a pretext to give up on reform, adding that these countries must be helped to avoid going into free fall because of the crisis.

Next year should also be the year of a settlement in Cyprus, Rehn said.

"Next year will be an important litmus test of whether Turkey is serious about its EU accession perspective," Rehn said in the interview. "After one or two years of domestic difficulties, we would expect Turkey now to put up a new gear and seriously start to pursue the reforms again."

Turkey began accession negotiations in 2005 and has made slow progress in satisfying the EU. Analysts say political distractions at home and a lack of appetite for further enlargement among EU states have pushed accession to the back burner in Turkey.

Turkish society has long been divided over the role of religion in an officially secular but predominantly Muslim country. Turkey narrowly avoided a crisis this year over a public prosecutor's attempt to have the Constitutional Court ban the governing Justice and Development Party because of its Islamist bent.

"I am aware of the dilemmas of the Turkish society in relation with the more secular and more religious lifestyles," Rehn said. "It is essential that Turkish society find a modus vivendi."

"There is too much energy used on internal tensions which could be used for pursuing legal and economic reforms that are required for EU membership."

He said it was essential for Turkey to reform its Constitution and increase freedom of expression, and religious and linguistic rights, to be in line with EU standards. He said trade unions and business federations were blocking a trade union law essential to Turkey's EU accession process.

Rehn urged Turkey to get to business quickly as local elections approach. "The sooner the better, but at the latest after the March elections, Turkey should totally resume the reforms again," he said.

After Montenegro formally applied for EU membership, Rehn said it was likely that other Balkan countries would apply next year. But he urged them not to rush as they needed to step up reforms first.

He said the EU had "rather encouraged the countries to take some time to prepare their application for EU membership because indeed they need to have a convincing track record."

Serbia is among those knocking on the EU's door, but the Netherlands has so far blocked the implementation of an interim trade agreement, the first step on the way to EU accession.

The Netherlands say Belgrade must first arrest the former Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladic and

hand him over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, or ICTY.

"In my view, Serbia is seriously cooperating with the ICTY," Rehn said in the interview. "This would be the right time to start implementing the interim agreement," he added, saying this would help, not hamper, the drive to arrest Mladic.

He said next year must see a comprehensive settlement for the divided island of Cyprus, urging all parties, and in particular Turkey, to step up efforts.

Greek and Turkish Cypriots have lived separately since a Turkish invasion in 1974 in response to a Greek-inspired coup. Leaders of the two communities resumed talks in September after a four-year hiatus.

Rehn said all parties should work to create a "win-win situation" for the two communities.

"We are not in the business of pressure. We are in the business of facilitation," he said. "It's important for everybody, but Turkey is one of the key stakeholders."

He called it essential "to reunify the island so that Cyprus could be like a normal EU member state, in peace, united."

A settlement on Cyprus has eluded diplomats for decades. Peace efforts collapsed in 2004 when Greek Cypriots rejected a UN reunification blueprint accepted by Turkish Cypriots. Cyprus then joined the EU under its internationally recognized government, which includes only Greek Cypriots.

Rehn said that it was important that the talks continue to be driven by the leaders of the two parts of the island, but that the EU was ready to bring as much legal and technical support as required by the two parties or the United Nations.

The fact that Cyprus is a member of the EU has wide-ranging impact on the reunification talks, as they mean bringing the north of the island into the 27-nation bloc, with its massive legislation and specific deals with nations like Turkey.

"It is a matter of paramount importance for the EU to see a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus," Rehn said.

TURQUIE: 3 SOLDATS TUÉS, 9 BLESSÉS DANS UNE ATTAQUE DES REBELLES KURDES



DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 25 déc 2008 (AFP) -

TROIS SOLDATS turcs ont été tués et neuf autres blessés, dont quatre grièvement mercredi soir dans une attaque de rebelles kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a-t-on appris jeudi de source officielle locale.

Des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont attaqué à l'arme automatique un minibus de l'armée dans la petite ville de Cizre, proche des frontières avec l'Irak et la Syrie, a-t-on précisé de mêmes sources.

Des opérations sont en cours pour appréhender les "terroristes", dénomination officielle du PKK, a-t-on ajouté.

Le PKK est un mouvement séparatiste kurde basé principalement dans le sud-est de la Turquie peuplé majoritairement de kurdes et dans le nord de l'Irak, et qui mène une lutte armée meurtrière contre Ankara depuis 1984.



December 22, 2008

Hürriyet

Iraqi president hopeful PKK will down arms against Turkey via dialogue

Sulaimaniyah. — Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said Monday he was hopeful that the Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Part (PKK) would lay down arms, and urged for dialogue in the fight against the rebel organization.

"The main aim for me, Massoud Barzani (the president of Kurdistan region in northern Iraq) and other politicians is persuading those in the mountains to lay down arms and engage in political dialogue," Talabani told in an interview with broadcaster CNNTurk in Sulaimaniyah.

Iraqi Kurdish leaders and officials from Turkey's pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) would hold a conference, www.ekurd.net in Europe or in Iraq, aimed at ending the rebel activities of the PKK, the head of the party said last week. They are expected to make a call for the PKK to down weapons.

Talabani, himself a Kurd, added that Iraqi Kurds do not plan to engage in an armed fight with PKK rebels in a bid to help Turkey's struggle with the PKK organization.

Iraqi President : Jalal Talabani, a Kurd

The PKK is considered a 'terrorist' organization by Ankara and U.S., the PKK continues to be on the blacklist list in EU despite court ruling

which overturned a decision to place the Kurdish rebel group PKK and its political wing on the European Union's terror list.

Turkey has started to hold direct contacts with Kurdistan regional government (KRG), retreating from its position to reject dialogue with Erbil, who Ankara has accused of supporting the PKK. Kurdish authorities in Kurdistan strongly reject the claim.

Talabani also said he expected the cooperation mechanism between Turkey and Iraq to work more actively.

Turkey and Iraq have established a Strategic Cooperation High Council to promote relations and to deal with the PKK. The Council foresees at least one meeting a year with prime ministers, www.ekurd.net and three representatives at the ministerial level.

Since 1984 the Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) took up arms for self-rule in the



mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey (Turkey-Kurdistan). A large Turkey's Kurdish community openly sympathise with the Kurdish PKK rebels. Turkey refuses to recognize its Kurdish population as a distinct minority.

The PKK demanded Turkey's recognition of the Kurds' identity in its constitution and of their language as a native language along with Turkish in the country's Kurdish areas, the party also demanded an end to ethnic discrimination in Turkish laws and constitution against Kurds, ranting them full political freedoms.

Turkey refuses to recognize its Kurdish population as a distinct minority. It has allowed some cultural rights such as limited broadcasts in the Kurdish language and private Kurdish language courses with the prodding of the European Union, but Kurdish politicians say the measures fall short of their expectations.

ASIA TIMES

December 23, 2008

The 'other Iraq' forges ahead

By Stephen Starr

IRBIL, northern Iraq - In the town of Amadiya, sitting atop a picturesque outcrop on the Iraqi-Turkish border, Kivi and his brother have recently returned from Australia.

"We just arrived here from Irbil yesterday and we're here for four months. Coming back here from Perth is like walking into a time warp." It's mid-December and locals say snow is just around the corner. "The women in Australia are not so good, not so genuine, so we've come back here to find a Kurdish girl," adds Kivi, or Kevin as he likes to be called by his English-speaking friends.

Just last February, and again in May, Turkish forces launched

major assaults into Iraqi Kurdistan in pursuit of renegade Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) fighters, many of whom are now seeking refuge in the autonomous northern Iraqi region.

One local points out that at the other side of a nearby mountain on the Ser Amadiya mountain range, the "fighters" warded off the Turkish enemy recently.

The Kurdish region in northern Iraq has stayed several steps ahead of the rest of the country since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. Under his rule, the Kurdish minority was treated dreadfully, with close to 200,000 killed, often by gassing.

Kivi and his family left Iraq during the first Gulf War in 1991. "It was impossible to stay, even up here in this isolated town people suffered persecution, and so we ran over the border to Turkey and finally settled in Australia."

During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, the Kurdish minority was regarded by the regime as



siding with Iran. Now, the Kurdish-populated cities of Dohuk, Irbil and Sulaimaniya are bustling centers of trade. Locals say the war never really arrived in the north, in comparison to the rest of the country.

Things looking up

In recent months, the rest of Iraq has seen attacks abate and Barack Obama has been voted in as the next American president on a campaign

promise of scaling down in Iraq.

A massive step towards facilitating a sovereign Iraq took place on November 27 when the Iraqi parliament passed the Status of Forces Agreement by almost three to one, adding legal grounding for the departure of American troops by the end of 2011.

Primer Mimster Nuri al-Maliki followed up by making it publicly clear that no extension was to be facilitated. Regional elections expected to

take place at the end of January will stand as one of the first steps to an all-encompassing nationwide democratic forum. Fourteen of Iraq's 18 provinces are set to cast ballots which, according to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, will provide "the most detailed insight so far into the relative strength of Iraq's political parties".

In September, an internationally renowned school opened its doors to students in Khanzad on the outskirts of Irbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region. Raed Mahmoud, a Chouefat school representative at the new facility, said, "We have enrolled students from Lebanon, Romania and the United States among other countries, but interestingly, the majority of students are Kurds coming back from other countries." Violence across the country has dropped to the lowest level since the 2003 American-led invasion.

Stability sees problems evolve

However, with the countrywide decline in violence, inevitable political quagmires have mushroomed and look set to dominate the new face of Iraq. Headlines depicting the awful carnage that has seen thousands killed and millions displaced have waned, but fears remain over how Iraq's long-term reconstruction plans will be divided among the country's various ethnic groups. Homogenous regions previously regarded as havens of stability could become political flashpoints as Iraq's vast reserves of oil and gas become focal points of importance. Iraqi Kurdistan is a prime case in point.

In Kurdistan, signs depicting civil society organizations are now commonplace. In Amadiya, a town of about 6,000, offices promoting women's liberties, support groups for political prisoners and the Kurdistan Communist Party can be found all along a single street. The word "Kurdistan" appears everywhere and nationalism has blossomed in light of newfound freedoms.

The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has been working hard to depict itself as being an opposite to the rest of Iraq, even posting a website under the title of "The Other Iraq" whereby it is encouraging tourists with imagery of breathtaking scenery.

More important in terms of politics, it is looking to exploit and further utilize the most valuable asset in its possession, oil. In a country where crude oil reserves are estimated at 115 billion barrels, ownership of this precious commodity has quickly become a sticking point and for the territorial integrity of the entire country, this means bad news.

The northern city of Kirkuk, populated by an

ethnic mix of Arabs, Christians, Kurds and Turkomans, sits adjacent to one of the largest untapped oilfields in the region. For all concerned, the status of Kirkuk represents a strategic crossroad and legitimate claims can be made by the KRG and the central government.

Kirkuk was dominated by a Kurdish majority until Saddam's attempted "Arabization" of the northern provinces during the 1970s. Now it rests under the administrative control of Baghdad and is populated by an eclectic mix of Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans and other minorities. The relative stability enjoyed in the north has allowed the KRG to push ahead in pursuing deals with international energy companies. So far, two dozen contracts have been signed with companies from Canada, South Korea and Turkey, among others.

For over 12 months, negotiations have been continuing between the KRG and Baghdad over oil concerns. When Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani visited Irbil in November, his comments that Kurdish oil would be connected to national pipelines bound for Turkey led many to think a softening in relations was imminent.

However, Baghdad insists the KRG has no right to conduct oil deals with foreign interests independently, based on Article 140 of the historic 2005 Iraqi constitution. The KRG claims exactly the opposite. As such, up to 20 contracts signed by the KRG with Iraqi and foreign interests since February 2007 - without authorization from the central government - have been regarded as "illegitimate".

In addition to this, the decrease in the price of oil has led to increased competition among international companies, something that has led to renewed interest in the "safe part" of Iraq. Such events can only conspire to hasten conflict over the issue, still governed by an oil trade law from the Saddam era. The law itself supposes control of oilfields to the Baghdad-controlled Oil Ministry.

New potential for violence

That the northern Kurdish region has until now passed under the radar of observers drawn to the violence in Baghdad, Fallujah and the western provinces is something that seems set to change.

The disagreements over oil ownership, of which the International Crisis Group regards as "arguably exceed[ing] the Sunni-Shi'ite divide that spawned the 2005-2007 sectarian war", have been fueling other problems.

Since late 2007, standoffs between Iraqi forces and the Kurdish paramilitary Peshmerga have increased. In August, one such incident in Khanaqin, close to the Iranian border, saw Kurd-

ish forces, openly operating in territory under Baghdad's control, confronted and removed by Iraqi soldiers. The KRG claims it has a right to protect Kurds wherever they may be in Iraq.

The bombing in Kirkuk on the third day of the festival of Eid al-Adha this month was the deadliest in Iraq for six months. Fifty-five people were killed in a restaurant attack where a meeting of local Arab leaders and representatives of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan was the suspected target.

It is believed leaders were meeting to thrash out the future status of Kirkuk and its accompanying oil reserves. On the border we caught up with Ali, a 25-year-old Turkoman from the Askarie neighborhood in north Kirkuk. He said, "Of course the bombing's a surprise. Us, the Kurds and Arabs get on well in Kirkuk and it's a shame to see Iraq reported on for all its bad points."

However, attacks on Christians in Kirkuk and across the north over the past 12 months, and on the Yezidi sect more recently, are timely reminders that while foreign troops - so often conductors of violence - have started to pull out (only 15 of the original 35 "coalition of the willing" countries remain in Iraq), distributing Iraq's spoils will require a new direction in diplomacy to transcend the fog of war.

Conclusion

It is part of the Kurdish identity to battle against outsiders and the dozens of checkpoints, the presence of Turkish troops and a tank hidden away in a parking lot remind one of the palpable sense of uncertainty in Amadiya and throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. Now that they have access to valuable assets, Kurds are seeking a profitable new future.

At the Azrahim Khalil border crossing, hundreds of trucks heading north to Turkey undergo extensive examinations, with the vehicles stripped down and their contents and licenses checked. Throwing an eye across the trucks, oil tankers dominate the cargo being shipped out of Kurdistan, with similar scenes to be found on highways all across Iraqi Kurdistan.

The central government in Baghdad may disapprove of such activity taking place right underneath its nose, but regardless, the KRG wants the world - and Baghdad - to know it means, and is seeking out, business.

Stephen Starr is a freelance journalist based in Damascus where he serves as deputy editor of the Syria Times.

Kurd factor in Iraq game

By Mohammad Akef Jamal, Special to Gulf News

There had been no love lost among those who opposed the former Iraqi regime and they continue not to have a common agenda for a bright Iraqi future.

Mahmoud Othman, a leading figure in the Kurdish Alliance, said recently, "Nouri Al Maliki, Iraq's Prime Minister, stands there with his hands folded, enjoying Kurdistan being bombed by Iran and Turkey."

Othman's comment was in reference to Al Maliki's recent visit to Turkey (a proposed visit to Iran was later cancelled) within the framework of the joint Iraqi, Turkish, and Iranian High Committee.

What awaits Iraq as its ruling parties face one another instead of

finding solutions to the country's problems? What will be the outcome of the absence of trust and goodwill among partners in the Iraqi political process?

This is not the first time the Kurds have expressed their anxiety over an Iraqi prime minister's visit to Turkey.

Kurds voiced similar concerns when former Iraqi prime minister Ebrahim Al Jafari visited Turkey in 2005, where the official delegation also included the current Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshair Zibari.

That visit ignited Kurdish animosity towards Al Jafari, leading to the Kurdish Alliance's insistence on denying Al Jafari a second term as premier.

The closed-door meetings between Al Maliki and the heads of the two states he visited worries the Kurds. Othman also said: "I am suspicious of Al Maliki's visit to Turkey. Exerting pressure on the Kurdish region would have been the main negotiation topic."

The Iraqi Kurdish region is under local and regional pressure. Internally, disagreements have erupted between the Iraqi regional authorities and the centre to such an extent that clashes have broken out over disputed areas.

There are also disagreements between the Kurds and several Iraqi political blocs, as a result of the Kurds' insistence on an almost autonomous status inside Iraq.

Additional pressure

The situation is not much better regionally. Iraq's Kurdistan is exposed to additional pressure from neighbouring countries such as Iran and Turkey. Both have shelled Kurdish border villages and crossed the border, taking advantage of the government's silence.

This Iraqi stance is seen as a result of either its weakness or its approval of what is happening in the country's northern region.

Kurdish politicians are worried about Al Maliki's contacts with the neighbouring countries at a time when relations between Baghdad and Erbil have deteriorated.

The problem is further worsened by the Governorate Council elections coming up next month.

There are several complex issues between Iraq and its two neighbours. Water, oil exports, Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Kirkuk and

other issues are on the top of the Iraqi-Turkish folio.

On the Iranian side, the dossier is much more complicated, but the major issue is the perceived Iranian intervention in Iraq's internal affairs. Iraq also needs to set Iran's mind at ease regarding the US-Iraqi strategic agreement (Sofa).

In the past, Iranian ties had a strategic dimension for the Kurdish rebels against the Iraqi government.

But now, Iran does not play that card anymore. Iraqi Kurds whom Iran backed in the 1960's and 1970's no longer need the Iranian support, as the Kurds have become politicians who rule a region inside a sovereign country.

Iran's bombing of Kurdish border locations is defensive, as it feels threatened by the power the Iraqi Kurds have gained.

There are more than 6 million Kurds in Iran in areas contiguous to the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Tehran feels that weakening the neighbouring Kurdish region will help it in protecting its national integrity.

Although the Kurdish alliance considers the Iranian bombings of its villages as an act of aggression, Al Maliki's government seems to read differently into the situation.

The Iraqi government does not regard the Turkish and Iranian military violations of Iraqi border as an act of aggression.

Iraqi government's silence in this matter shows it considers the Turkish and Iranian military acts as pressure exerted to its benefit, as it helps weaken the Kurds.

Dr Mohammad Akef Jamal is an Iraqi writer based in Dubai.

The
Economist

Dec 30th 2008 |

Turkey and the Kurds TELEVISION DIPLOMACY

ANKARA AND DIYARBAKIR

Hopes that a new channel may herald fresh reforms

ROJIN is a feisty, beautiful Kurdish bard who belts out nationalist ballads. As a result, private Kurdish television channels that showed her were long penalised or even taken off the air. But now she will be a regular on Turkey's stultified TRT state television, which this week launched a 24-hour Kurdish channel in the main Kurdish dialect, Kurmanji.

A contradiction, yes. But it may just suggest that the Justice and Development (AK) party is regaining the reformist zeal that made it one of Turkey's most popular and progressive governments. Kurdish hardliners scoff that the new channel is a cynical sop to the country's 14m-odd Kurds before local elections in March. When Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the AK prime minister, told an audience of Kurds in Diyarbakir in 2005 that the state had made mistakes in its treatment of the Kurds, his party won many a Kurdish heart (and vote). But it has lost them since he succumbed to the army's demands to deal with Kurdish PKK rebels by force, not negotiation.

The army has been relentlessly pounding PKK guerrilla bases in northern Iraq. The PKK's civilian arm, the Democratic Society Party, which has 20 elected parliamentarians, has been con-

sistently snubbed by the AK government. Court cases bordering on the ludicrous continue against its members and against Kurdish-run municipalities that name their streets after eminent Kurds. One child in a Kurdish family from Germany was refused entry at the Turkish border recently because he had a Kurdish name.

Even radical Kurds express hope that the new television channel, however wimpish, may spell a new beginning. Indeed, they hope the AK will renew the reform promises that helped it to win reelection, with a bigger share of the vote, in July 2007. Mr Erdogan is expected to make a statement during the televised launch. Kurdish dissidents are due to host some of its shows. Whether it can compete with the PKK's hugely popular satellite channel, Roj, is another question.

Private Kurdish television channels in Turkey are allowed to broadcast in their mother tongue for only four hours a week. Every show is vetted and has to have Turkish subtitles, making live programmes impossible. But the fact that Shivan Perwer, one of the most renowned Kurdish nationalist singers, is considering appearing on TRT's Channel Six is being widely hailed as a breakthrough.

In another move, some 200 Turkish intellectuals have launched an internet petition about the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Armenians during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, saying that they are sorry. The text of their apology does not use the term genocide, favoured by Armenians. But at least 25,000 Turks, from many different walks of life, have signed the petition, prompting calls of treason by far-right nationalists. Mr Erdogan himself has called the petition "a mistake". The country's president, Abdullah Gul, who has spearheaded secret talks to normalise relations with Armenia, has been accused by an opposition parliamentarian of having Armenian ancestry. He took her to court, claiming his lineage was Turkish and Muslim to boot.

The petition's signatories have also been assailed by many Armenians, who dismiss it as a ploy to get Barack Obama, who has used the G-word in the past, to drop it. Yet some are less recalcitrant. Khatchig Mouradian, a writer in the Armenian diaspora, says that "without such initiatives, traditional diplomacy resolves too little, late, and risks looking like mere make-up on a deeply scarred face."

Le Monde
31 décembre 2008

TURQUIE AUDIOVISUEL

L'Etat turc lance sa première chaîne en langue kurde



Utiliser en public l'une des trois langues kurdes a longtemps été interdit en Turquie et demeure, dans certains cas, un acte de défiance envers le pouvoir central. Les choses ont changé. Les douze millions de Kurdes que compte la Turquie pourront désormais, dès le 1^{er} janvier, bran-

cher leur téléviseur sur une chaîne d'Etat émettant en kurde. Le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, participera au lancement de TRT 6 qui sera le reflet de « la diversité culturelle » du pays. L'Union européenne réclamait de longue date une telle initiative. ■

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

Pour la première fois en Turquie, à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2009, une chaîne de la Radio-télévision d'Etat (TRT) va émettre en langue kurde, provoquant une petite révolution dans le paysage audiovisuel turc. Vingt-quatre heures sur 24, la TRT 6 diffusera, sans sous-titres, des films, des documentaires, des séries et des émissions musicales.

Un bref aperçu de ses programmes a été dévoilé, jeudi 25 décembre, pour une répétition générale, à une semaine du lancement officiel auquel doit participer le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan. « L'objectif principal est de refléter la diversité culturelle de la Turquie », annonce la chaîne, répondant ainsi à une exigence d'ouverture réclamée de longue date par l'Union européenne.

Un tel souci est récent en Turquie où l'on compte environ 12 millions de Kurdes, soit un habitant sur six. L'interdiction de diffu-

sion a été levée, légalement, en 2002. Utiliser l'une des trois langues kurdes – kirmanji, sorani ou zaza – a longtemps été interdit et demeure, dans certains cas, un acte de défiance envers l'Etat. Dans les années 1980, les Kurdes parlaient une « langue inconnue », le Langage des montagnes, selon le titre d'une courte pièce écrite par Harold Pinter, au retour d'un voyage en Turquie. « C'est la reconnaissance par l'Etat d'une langue dont l'existence même était niée », estime l'avocat Sezgin Tanrikulu, ancien bâtonnier de Diyarbakir. Mais si l'objectif est de se débarrasser du PKK [Parti des travailleurs kurdes], alors c'est une erreur. »

Instrument politique

Dans la région kurde, la naissance de cette chaîne publique est accueillie avec prudence. A trois mois des élections municipales, elle est perçue comme une manœuvre du parti au pouvoir, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP). Les restrictions encadrant l'utilisation de la langue kurde restent trop nombreuses, dans l'éducation et les services publics notamment. Des maires de villes du sud-est du pays sont encore régulièrement condamnés pour avoir employé leur langue maternelle dans des tracts ou des discours politiques.

Le chanteur et poète kurde Sivan Perwer, en exil en Europe depuis 1976, a été approché par la TRT pour participer au lancement, le 1^{er} janvier. Il a décliné l'offre. Pour beaucoup, la chaîne ne peut être autre chose que « la voix de la Turquie », un instrument politique au service de l'Etat. Le coordinateur de TRT 6, Sinan Ilhan, ex-diplomate kurdophone nommé par le gouvernement, affirme qu'il s'agit avant tout de « fournir des programmes contribuant à la prise de conscience démocratique de la population du pays ».

Le but est aussi de contrer l'influence des chaînes satellitaires comme la très populaire Roj TV qui émet depuis le Danemark et qui est accusée de servir de porte-voix à la rébellion armée du PKK qui, avec ses différents relais politiques et médiatiques, a appelé au boycott de la télévision publique. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER